



Reading the Posthuman: Contemporary Fiction and Critical Theory

by

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Abstract

Reading the Posthuman: Contemporary Fiction and Critical Theory

Representations of the posthuman in contemporary novels are of great cultural and political significance because of their capacity to expose and challenge attitudes to structures of human privilege and ideas of the future organised around the normative human subject. As a privileged site for the cultural construction of human identity, the novel is an ideal domain not only for examining those depictions of the human but also for breaking them apart. Through analysing the representation of the posthuman in contemporary novels, this thesis seeks to provide a clearer and more critical understanding of the human in novels at the start of the twenty-first century, and the role of fiction in both perpetuating and conspiring against dominant ideas of the human.

The thesis mobilises recent theoretical debates about the posthuman and posthumanism as a conceptual framework to investigate the status of the posthuman in fiction. It then offers close readings of how five early twenty-first-century novels imagine the human differently, including Michel Faber's *Under the Skin* (2000), Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003), David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004), Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) and Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods* (2007).

The posthuman has traditionally been shoehorned into a question for theory and, specifically, the critical framework of posthumanism. Posthumanist scholarship has often overlooked the posthuman's proliferation in fiction and, in particular, how significant literary novels of the early twenty-first century have unsettled normative ideas of the human. Indeed, the central argument of this thesis is that the cultural and

political “work” of the posthuman and posthumanism is carried out by both literature and theory. The thesis defends the position that reading novels is imperative to establishing a critical politics of the human, and argues that novels about the posthuman intervene in posthumanism’s theoretical project. In telling stories of radically decentred human subjectivity, these novels dramatise their own critique of the human and its ensconced position of privilege within the Western cultural imagination.

Detailed textual analysis of the posthuman in contemporary literature illustrates the complexities and contradictions underlying culture’s attempts to rework the traditional human subject. In particular, this thesis analyses the persistent depiction of the posthuman as a queer figure in the selected novels and more broadly. In these queer manifestations, the posthuman is militant in its disruption of any normative sense of the human and its future. A reading of *Never Let Me Go* discusses language’s regulation of the posthuman and normative sexuality’s purchase on the human. An examination of *Under the Skin* considers the posthuman as a nexus of anxieties about anomalous bodies, sexuality and consumption practices. Analyses of *Oryx and Crake* and *The Stone Gods* demonstrate the posthuman’s significance to fictional thought experiments of human extinction, the Anthropocene and human reproductive futures. Finally, a chapter on *Cloud Atlas* addresses the failure of the posthuman to usher in any final dismantling of the human as the underlying term of Western culture and politics. These analyses emphasise that the posthuman imagination exists in a state of tension with a revived and normative human exceptionalism, which surreptitiously re-enters posthuman fictions to restabilise narratives upon reassuring human scales.

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INTRODUCTION

A Different Human Story: Novels of the Posthuman

Representations of the posthuman in early twenty-first-century novels are of great cultural and political significance because of their capacity to expose and actively transgress attitudes to structures of human privilege and ideas of the future organised around the normative human subject. As a privileged site for the cultural construction of human identity, the novel is an ideal domain not only for examining those depictions of the human but also for breaking them apart. Through analysing the representation of the posthuman in a selection of contemporary literary novels, this thesis provides a clearer and more critical understanding of the human in literature at the start of the twenty-first century, and considers the role of fiction in both perpetuating and resisting dominant ideas of the human.

The thesis mobilises recent theoretical debates about the posthuman and posthumanism as a conceptual framework to investigate the status of the posthuman in fiction. It then offers close readings of how five significant early twenty-first-century novels imagine the human differently, including Michel Faber's *Under the Skin* (2000), Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003), David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004), Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) and Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods* (2007). These novels place the human under duress to make fascinating and sometimes surprising interventions in the project of posthumanist thought. Posthuman fictions such as these unite storytelling and critical theory to rethink the human and provide a richer posthumanist understanding of literature; posthumanism as a critical paradigm must, as these novels demonstrate, recognise the critical work carried out by fictional representation. The novels I examine in this thesis tell stories

of radically decentred human identity and in doing so, perform and dramatise their critiques of the human and its ensconced position of privilege within the Western cultural imagination.

The primary concern of this thesis is the representation of posthuman stories in early twenty-first-century novels. It seeks also to deepen understanding of key concepts in critical posthumanist theory through detailed explication of exemplary novels of the posthuman.

The thesis takes posthumanism as its critical paradigm whilst being wholly convinced that novels enable us to better see how the human emerges as a cultural artefact from literature. Broadly conceived, posthumanism critiques the entrenched anthropocentrism and the legacy of humanism in the Western culture. In particular, posthumanist scholars pay close attention to the philosophical definition of the properly human subject. As I write in Chapter One, the figure of the posthuman is indispensable to posthumanism's critical project. The posthuman is a cultural trope that imaginatively reworks ideas of the traditional human subject. It produces a critical ontology of the human and enables speculative engagement with the literally post-human future of a world without humans. The early twenty-first century in particular has witnessed an explosion of posthuman narratives in novels, which deploy the posthuman as a literary device to expose the fault lines running through our human-centric imagination. Novels of the posthuman tell stories of radical human difference, contributing to and dramatically expanding literature's depiction of the possibilities of human life in texts.

As Pramod K. Nayar remarks, "it has been said that literature 'invented' the human" (2). Scholarship has been drawn to the novel in particular as a privileged site for the imagination and construction of the human in the twenty-first century

(Adiseshiah and Hildyard; Boxall; Eaglestone; Graham; Nayar; Trexler). Robert Eaglestone argues that “the way literature thinks”—the active work of literature to think through, explore and interrogate the world—“is bound up with what it’s like ... to be human” (1). Literature “is how we make ourselves intelligible to ourselves” and contemporary fiction “matters” especially “because it is how we work out who we are now, today” (1). Eaglestone singles out the novel as “the best way” of producing human identity in the twenty-first century (1), asserting that the novel “is still the art form most deeply and directly engaged” with humankind (2). Criticism has an imperative, Eaglestone points out, to ask, “who is the ‘we’ made intelligible by a novel’s thinking?” (4). While literary studies is certainly a “humanistic discipline” (Nayar 32), the twenty-first century has witnessed a deluge of novels that remake the human and confront anthropocentric privilege. Contemporary novels now have an ethical imperative and “challenge,” as Siân Adiseshiah and Rupert Hildyard argue, “to remake the human understanding of the world” (2). Nayar argues that literature is the domain where “the *possibilities*” of human identity “might be best witnessed” but also “defined, described and debated” (32 emphasis in original). Novels of the posthuman exemplify how “‘the stories we live by’ can be important critical tools in the task of articulating what it means to be human” in the twenty-first century (Graham 17). Humans recognise themselves in literature, which in turn challenges, dismantles and denaturalises human subjectivity.

The widespread decentring of the human in philosophy and theory disrupts the ingrained anthropocentric coordinates of narrative forms, which as Ursula K. Heise writes, “have conventionally focused above all on individuals, families, or nations” (*Sense* 205). Timothy Clark, too, is critical of anthropocentrism’s domestication of narrative, which organises narrative forms around the scale of the human and

structures stories with “a certain humanist cosiness” (*Ecocriticism* 99). Similarly, Claire Colebrook argues the human “imagination is all too novelistic” but also, that the novel itself “is human all too human” (“Counter” 2). Colebrook highlights how the novel and the human exist in a mutually constitutive relation. Historically, the anthropocentrism of narrative forms has meant that the “familial, personal and linear plots” of novels have “restricted narrative attention to a number of human generations, rather than exploring the epic timelines that might begin to approach the real demands of the present” (Colebrook 2). The novel has long been complicit in normative narratives and ideologies of the human, sustaining “the forms of [anthropocentric] narrative lure” that more broadly, “have precipitated the crisis, not just of human life, but of life in general” (Colebrook 2). Adam Trexler outlines how de-anthropocentric pressures, such as climate change and the new geological age of the Anthropocene, “alter the forms and potentialities of art and cultural narrative” (5), “make new demands on the novel itself, forcing formal and narrative innovation” (10) and remake “basic narrative operations” (233). Changing ideas of the human and the expansion of ethical concern for other forms of life in recent decades, as well as ecological crises and extinction threats, have ruptured anthropocentrism’s narrative restrictions and exposed literature’s ideological exclusions.

Posthumanist literature imagines stories that humanist traditions cannot, or refuse to, confront. Reading stories about the posthuman, Neil Badmington writes, is “to see the certainties of humanism fade and to find bodies, minds, desires, limits, knowledge, and being itself reimagined in ways for which traditional anthropocentrism cannot possibly account” (“Posthumanism,” *Routledge Companion* 375-76). Peter Boxall asserts that the twenty-first century has witnessed rapidly changing expressions of the human in literature, following dramatic shifts in the

conceptualisation of temporality, materiality and embodiment. He writes that late twentieth-century Western culture was “dominated by a sense of the lateness of the hour” reflected in the “predominance of the prefix ‘post’ in the compound nouns that describe the later twentieth-century experience (poststructuralism and postmodernism, as well as postcolonialism, postfeminism, postnationalism, and so on)” (12). This “sense of an ending,” Boxall writes, “comes into a difficult contact with the apprehension of a youthful time” in the new millennium, “a dawning era for which we do not yet have a terminology” (12). Like a carry-over from twentieth-century “late culture,” twenty-first-century fiction is strongly informed by the present, and arguably intensifying, “deep and far-reaching crisis in our understanding of the limits of the human” (Boxall 12-13). As Boxall puts it, “the contemporary novel offers a striking picture of the estranged material conditions of posthuman embodiment in the new century,” while also reshaping questions of the human through “reaching for new ways of encoding such being, new ways of thinking the ethics and poetics of species being, after the breaching of the limits of the human” (13). Following the nonhuman turn’s re-situation of the human as one species among many, literature expresses changing ideas of humankind and its entanglement with the nonhuman world, as Heise describes: “the aesthetic transformation of the real has a particular potential for reshaping the individual and collective ecosocial imaginary” (“Afterword” 258). Novels of the posthuman consolidate ideas of anthropocentrism’s rupturing, and imaginatively narrate the cultural and political upheavals of the nonhuman turn, a development that I consider in Chapter One.

In its novelty, contemporary literature’s production of knowledge about the human constitutes an often-overlooked archive of posthumanist thought. “Art has already stepped into the breach” opened up by the human’s decentering in a radically

more-than-human world, writes Timothy Morton (*Ecological* 111). Literature's posthumanist archive has the potential to reshape the disciplinarity of literary studies itself, as Elizabeth Grosz recognises: "What would the study of, for example, literature and language which did not privilege the human as its paradigm look like?" (*Becoming* 14). In a dialogue with Colebrook about the problems thrown up by the Anthropocene about the human, Cary Wolfe draws attention to "different forms of human knowledge-making practice." Literature and art produce different kinds of knowledge to theory. Wolfe suggests that scholarly inquiry needs to pay more attention to literature and art's knowledge-making: "What is the difference between the kind of knowledge that philosophy or theory ... produce in relation to these concepts versus, say, literature or art? What kinds of knowledge, what kinds of conceptualisations of these problems are available" in these different modes of "performing the problem" (Wolfe and Colebrook, "Anthropocene")? In a sense, Wolfe echoes an argument made by Rita Felski about literary studies and its ingrained "hermeneutics of suspicion" (14), which decides "ahead of time that literary works can be objects of knowledge" that demand ideological critique "but never sources of knowledge" (19). This entrenched approach to studying literature "rule[s] out of court the eventuality that a literary text could know as much, or more, than a theory" (Felski 19). In this way, Wolfe suggests that literature and art explore "thick questions" of the human in different ways than theory and political discourse. Colebrook agrees, stating that literature and art "assault us" with human questions in ways beyond the scope of conventional scholarship, theory and philosophy (Wolfe and Colebrook, "Anthropocene").

Twenty-first-century novels invite us to rethink the cultural and political construction of human subjectivity. The novels examined by this thesis reveal the

posthuman's often antagonistic relation to the humanistic form of the novel and its ingrained tendencies. These novels imaginatively resist, destabilise and interrogate the novel's organising human framework.

My primary texts are hybrid novels. They are works of literary, speculative fiction. The authors of these works are widely regarded as literary novelists, demonstrated by the shortlisting of *Oryx and Crake*, *Cloud Atlas* and *Never Let Me Go* for the Man Booker Prize (in 2003, 2004 and 2005 respectively). Along with *Under the Skin* and *The Stone Gods*, all five of these texts are novels penned by literary authors who mine genre fiction, more or less successfully, for tropes to imagine the posthuman. Furthermore, these authors often have tense relationships with genre classifications, to the point of repudiating genre fiction entirely. Winterson earned the ire of Ursula K. Le Guin for her utilisation of and disdain for the science fiction genre in *The Stone Gods*: "I can only suppose that Jeanette Winterson is trying to keep her credits as a 'literary' writer even as she openly commits genre" ("Head"; see also Cain, for Le Guin's criticism of Ishiguro's recent novel *The Buried Giant* and his use of the fantasy genre). Faber is openly hostile to any classification of his work as other than "literary" (Jordan; Soyka) and Atwood's refusal to label her work "science fiction" attracted a certain notoriety in public discussions of literature (Atwood, *Other*; Le Guin, "Year"). Despite authorial protestations, Atwood, Faber, Ishiguro, Mitchell and Winterson clearly plumb a range of genres to craft novels that garner literary accolades and are consecrated by the high literary establishment. In many ways, these novels have the characteristics of the "literary bestseller," which Marie-Pierre Pouly describes as a relatively recent phenomenon that combines "entertaining reading with aesthetic value." In Pouly's analysis, the literary bestseller

plays “both sides of the field” by harnessing the entertainment value and “profitability” often attached to genre fiction with the “prestige” of literary fiction.

Criticism has noted that certain kinds of fiction are more likely to ask questions of the human. There remains a strong sense that the posthuman is most at home within popular culture (Clarke, “Posthumanism”; Graham; Hauskeller, Philbeck and Carbonell; Herbrechter; Herbrechter and Callus). Some critics have implied that this popular context means that the ramifications of the posthuman are largely self-evident: Michael Hauskeller, Thomas D. Philbeck and Curtis D. Carbonell write, “[l]uckily, one need not be a scholar to observe how this paradigm shift [of posthumanism] is affecting humanity, since much of the narrative is reflected in Western popular culture” (3). Science fiction and speculative fiction, utilising “contrivances or strategies” that are philosophically complex and “hardly implicit,” have operated as key genres for posthuman representation (Herbrechter and Callus 97). Stefan Herbrechter and Ivan Callus describe how the crisis of the human “has become a major formative aspect, even the foregrounded rationale” for Hollywood science fiction cinema (97). More recently, Trexler laments “the absence of the realist climate change novel” (224), pointing out that questions of climate change have predominantly been tackled by “science fiction, thrillers, dystopias, and apocalyptic narratives” rather than “literary realism” (223). Trexler has literary aspirations for climate change fiction, and asserts that we need literary, realist novels because they are more capable of expressing the reality and immediacy of climate crisis and the Anthropocene than speculative novels (233). He nonetheless concedes that speculative and imaginative fiction will remain central to literature’s engagement with ecological crisis and the cultural invention of “new ways of connecting diverse human beings” (236).

Both popular and literary modes of fiction have much to say about the human. This thesis focuses on novels that represent the literary uptake of posthuman questions. My examination of the posthuman concentrates on five early twenty-first-century literary, speculative novels, which are taken as exemplary of a broader trend in contemporary fiction. This broader literary trend represents what Boxall describes as twenty-first-century fiction's key thematic concern with the limits of the human (13). The twenty-first century has seen the publication of a swathe of notable novels that place conventional ideas of the human under duress, including but not limited to Atwood's *The Year of the Flood* (2009) and *MaddAddam* (2013), James Bradley's *Clade* (2015), Don DeLillo's *Point Omega* (2010) and *Zero K* (2016), Faber's *The Book of Strange New Things* (2014), Maggie Gee's *The Ice People* (1998), Michel Houellebecq's *The Possibility of an Island* (2005), Howard Jacobson's *J* (2014), Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* (2015), Ben Lerner's *10:04* (2014), Ben Marcus's *The Flame Alphabet* (2012), Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006), Mitchell's *The Bone Clocks* (2014), Gary Shteyngart's *Super Sad True Love Story* (2010), Claire Vaye Watkins's *Gold Fame Citrus* (2015), Charlotte Wood's *The Natural Way of Things* (2015) and Winterson's *The PowerBook* (2000).¹

My analysis of the posthuman takes the form of six chapters. Chapter One is a theoretical and contextual chapter, in which I establish a critical framework for reading novels of the posthuman. I survey critical debates about the posthuman and posthumanism, and argue that the posthuman is fundamentally reliant on literature

¹ Clearly, this contemporary trend in novels is informed by a literary history of destabilised human identity, which could include works ranging from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and *The Last Man* (1826), H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895) and *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (1896) through to Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984).

and characterised by tropes of queerness, which renew the critical pressures applied to the human by the nonhuman turn. Each of the next five chapters examines a particular early twenty-first-century novel and its representation of the posthuman, in relation to posthumanist theory; in this, my methodological approach is guided by Badmington's claim that the "work" of posthumanist thought is shared by both theoretical and fictional texts (see "Posthumanism," *Routledge Companion* 376). In Chapter Two I examine language's regulation of the human through a discussion of Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go*. I argue that the less-than-human subject positionality of the text's human clones is determined and rigorously maintained through an unspeakable speech act of condemnation. I also address the novel's entwining of humanness with comforting structures of heterosexuality and reproduction. Chapter Three continues the analysis of normative sexuality's purchase upon the human in the twenty-first-century novel. Contextualised by debates about human consumption practices, I discuss Faber's novel *Under the Skin* and the post-surgical alien body of its protagonist. Depicted as predatory and painfully sexed, this not-quite-alien and not-quite-human body concentrates anxieties about the sanctity of species divisions, hunting and meat eating.

In Chapter Four I examine the contemporary novel's representation of extinction and its influence on human ontology by addressing Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*. This novel, I argue, entertains but ultimately refuses the possibility of human extinction. Instead, Atwood's text revels in the vibrancy of nonhuman life and the sexual difference of the posthuman, while normative human futurity is quietly permitted a second chance. Chapter Five continues the analysis of extinction and sexual difference in novels of the posthuman. Focusing on how extinction threatens to extinguish sexual difference altogether, I discuss queer alternatives to human

reproductive futures by examining Winterson's novel *The Stone Gods*. The queerness of the posthuman, as my reading of Winterson demonstrates, need not be bound by the fatalism of a reproductively governed human future. In its very queerness, the posthuman resists and disrupts the narrative containments of a violently normative anthropocentrism.

In Chapter Six, the final chapter of this thesis, I explore the failures of the posthuman and posthumanism through a discussion of Mitchell's novel *Cloud Atlas*. This novel, I argue, makes an intervention in posthumanist thought only to assert a revitalised human subject and neohumanist politics legitimated by textuality and reading practices. The novel's posthuman subject matter, including human clones and extinction, collapses into the novel's relentless fascination for reading and rediscovering the human in text.

It is not my intention, in this thesis, to lament the posthuman for its failings or its tempered capacity for critique. Indeed the failure of posthuman novels to maintain their posthumanist projects only intensifies my interest in posthuman representation in literature. It may be that, finally, the novel remains an all-too-human form of cultural expression. The novel's intimacy with the human may find a better home in critical work on the inhuman, as I write in my conclusion, which promises both intimacy and radical estrangement from the human. I do not want to suggest that posthumanism's failures should preclude its inclusion as a serious interpretive frame for literary studies. Rather, I want to argue that problems with posthuman representation are evidence of broader problems with twenty-first-century literature's capacity to depict human identity differently.

CHAPTER ONE

Theorising the Posthuman: Theory, Fiction, Queerness

In a recent dialogue, Donna J. Haraway and Wolfe pronounce the posthuman “absurd” (261). A leading scholar of critical posthumanist theory, Wolfe rejects the posthuman as a “fantasy” of “triumphant transcendence of [human] embodiment” in favour of posthumanism, which for Wolfe is thoroughly distinct from the posthuman (*Posthumanism* 120). Haraway, a reluctant progenitor of posthumanism, declares that the posthuman is about “getting beyond one troubled category [the human] for a worse one” (*When* 17). She argues that the posthuman abandons the “urgent work” that “remains to be done in reference to those who must inhabit ... troubled categories” like the human (17). However, both Haraway and Wolfe underestimate the significance of the posthuman as a cultural and, in particular, a literary trope of the twenty-first century. Imagining the posthuman enables novels to grapple with, think through and reshape timely posthumanist questions.

In order to frame this thesis, this opening chapter surveys current debates in critical theory about the posthuman and posthumanism and makes a case for deeper engagement with fictional experiments in human representation. The posthuman, as I argue throughout this thesis, is a hybrid figure situated at the intersection of fiction and theory. In particular, the posthuman unites fiction and theory’s mutual grappling with the profound changes to the human condition taking place at the dawn of the twenty-first century. Through reading novels of the posthuman published at the beginning of the new millennium, I demonstrate that the posthuman persistently queers conventional ideas of the human. Both as a literary device and as a critical

concept, iterations of the posthuman queer the traditional human subject and the humanist structures that support normative anthropocentric privilege.

Examinations of the posthuman have been predominantly skewed towards the critical paradigm of posthumanism. Broadly conceived, posthumanism names the critique of “the very definition of the ‘properly human’,” which “constitutes a chauvinistic exceptionalism of the species and enables an ongoing hegemony in which the label of ‘human’ smuggles in historical, cultural, sexual, racial and class norms” (Colebrook, *Sex* 9). Contextualised by this theoretical framework, in this thesis I explore how contemporary fiction depicts the posthuman in two significant ways. As a literary device, its representation in novels interrogates a dynamic ontology of the human through a variety of unsettling tropes including human clones, aliens, dehumanised humans, genetically engineered humanoid species and desirable robots. Increasingly, contemporary fiction also employs the posthuman to imagine a world after humans. This literally post-human thought experiment is important for how the “properly human” is defined in the context of mass extinction, as the Anthropocene—a new geologic age of the planet reflecting human impact—gains widespread acceptance. Both the ontological and extinctive senses of the posthuman result in a more critical understanding of the human that operates across both fiction and theory. As such, this study takes Badmington’s assertion as its grounding conviction: “posthumanism is as much a matter of theory as it is a question of fiction” (“Posthumanism,” *Routledge Companion* 376). The posthuman, I argue, is a creature of text that actively transgresses the boundary between theoretical inquiry and fictional representation.

Through a series of chapters focused on exemplary novels of the posthuman, this thesis addresses the scholarly neglect of the posthuman’s proliferation in

literature of the early twenty-first century. The posthuman dominates fictional experiments in human representation. Throughout each chapter, I consider how each novel imagines the posthuman as a nexus of imaginative literature and critical theory. Novels afford us the possibility to think through the human's position of privilege within culture and politics. As well as theory's more established critique of the human, the work of posthumanism is carried out by fiction in important ways that demand scholarly attention. I demonstrate that contemporary novels return again and again to the posthuman as a queer trope, which destabilises normative conventions of the human and its future. I remain unconvinced, however, that such a queer posthumanity can usher in any final dismantling of the human as the key term of culture and politics. The posthuman imagination exists perennially in a state of tension with a revived human exceptionalism, which surreptitiously re-enters posthuman fictions to restabilise the narrative upon a reassuring human scale.

Defining the Posthuman: Posthumanism, Animal Studies, Disability Studies

"Not all of us can say," Rosi Braidotti writes, "with any degree of certainty, that we have always been human, or that we are only that" (1). The posthuman and its related critical framework, posthumanism, seek to reveal a specific and historicised understanding of the human as a subject position inherited from Enlightenment humanism. As Badmington explains,

the human being occupies a natural and eternal place at the very centre of things, where it is distinguished absolutely from machines, animals, and other inhuman entities; where it shares with all other human beings a unique essence; where it is the origin of meaning and the sovereign subject of history; and where it behaves and believes according to something called 'human

nature.’ In the humanist account, human beings are exceptional, autonomous and set above the world that lies at their feet. (“Posthumanism,” *Routledge Companion* 374)

This humanist conceptualisation of the human described by Badmington pervades Western thought, politics and culture. Bruce Clarke writes, “the posthumanist charge against humanism is that its claims to a universality of human reference are spurious” (“Posthumanism”). Through humanism’s “privileging” of humankind over the “nonhuman environment, the varieties of humanism enforce a species exclusivity that masks any number of intraspecific sexual, racial, ethnic and social exclusions” (Clarke). Posthumanism, as a critical framework, and the posthuman, as a recurrent figure in the cultural imaginary, dispute and disrupt humanism’s universalising category of the human.

Recent scholarly and mainstream debates about climate change and the Anthropocene have redoubled the critical pressures applied to the human in the twenty-first century. As Dana Luciano and Mel Y. Chen explain, there are now at least three dominant forms of the human: the “normative and masculinized” humanist subject (as described by Badmington), the “often-feminized subject of sympathy” defined by humane and empathetic behaviour, and in the context of climate crisis, “the human as species” understood as an evolutionary emergence and a terraforming global entity facing extinction (190). As a species, the human is conceptualised as a telluric, planetary force that is also precariously vulnerable to a properly post-human future: a world without humans.

Furthermore, the recent explosion of interest in the posthuman and posthumanism comprises an important part of “the nonhuman turn” taking place in philosophy and theory. The nonhuman turn, write Jon Roffe and Hannah Stark,

announces “a critical reappraisal of the human and its place in a broader, nonhuman context” (2). The nonhuman turn “has been instrumental in challenging human privilege” and is “motivated in part by the ongoing theoretical and political interrogation of the anthropocentrism of the Western tradition” (2). This “interdisciplinary affair” has radically decentred human subjectivity and its position of normative power, as Roffe and Stark explain (2). The nonhuman turn undertakes a multifaceted

critique of the liberal humanist subject as an exclusionary site: protecting some members of the human species by admitting them to the category of ‘the human’ while depriving others of its status and privilege. This manifests in the history of violent political exclusions based on race, gender, sexuality, and bodily capacities and incapacities. (Roffe and Stark 2)

Richard Grusin (paraphrasing Bruno Latour) describes how the nonhuman turn insists “that ‘we have never been human’ but that the human has always coevolved, coexisted, or collaborated with the nonhuman—and that the human is characterized precisely by this indistinction from the nonhuman” (ix-x). Grosz emphasises how the nonhuman turn calls us to rethink our established systems of thought. She argues that the humanities, as the privileged scholarly locus of the human, must recognise a more critical politics of the human as well as “the ontological forces of the nonhuman that press the human from both within and outside” (“Interview” 23). The nonhuman turn reveals human ontology and human knowledge-making practices as anything but exclusively human, with significant implications for thought and disciplinarity.

Grusin fails to recognise, however, that the human’s entanglement with the nonhuman is precisely what critical forms of the posthuman interrogate. For Grusin, the posthuman represents “teleology or progress in which we begin with the human

and see a transformation from the human to the posthuman, after or beyond the human” as a kind of “historical development” (ix). However, a critical examination of the posthuman in fiction reveals that the posthuman, significantly, is posthumanist in the sense conceptualised by Wolfe. Critical posthumanism, writes Wolfe, does not triumphantly transcend the human body or abandon human subject positionality (see *Posthumanism* xv-xvi). Even from its position within the nonhuman turn, the posthuman, as this thesis argues, is fundamentally about the human.

As a critique of the human, the posthuman is an intensely contested idea in critical theory. There is still no widespread agreement on a definition of the posthuman. N. Katherine Hayles explains, “there is no consensus on what the posthuman portends, in part because how the posthuman is constructed and imagined varies so widely” (*How* 251). It has been variously theorised as the broad “condition” of contemporary human life in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century (Braidotti), as the wrongful abandonment of the human’s embodied and material existence (Wolfe, *Posthumanism*), as an evolutionary progression of the species demanding a reappraisal of philosophy (Grosz, *Becoming*) and, counter-intuitively, as yet another example of the worst kind of anthropocentric parochialism (Weinstein and Colebrook). The term’s capaciousness lends the posthuman a conceptual slipperiness, which manifests as a form of imaginative possibility that quickly gives way to anthropocentric anxieties.

Posthuman subject positionality is characterised by uncertainty and flux, functioning always as the human’s unsettling other whilst also striving for its own realisation and agency. As Judith Halberstam and Ira Livingston put it, “[d]riven instead by the double impossibility and prerequisite to become other and to become itself, the posthuman body *intrigues* rather than desires; it is intrigued and intriguing”

(14 emphasis in original). The passivity of this formulation—the posthuman body seemingly fixed in place by the force of the human’s contemplative intrigue—belies the posthuman’s concentration of disruptive desire, fear and anxiety. Braidotti writes that the posthuman “provokes elation but also anxiety” (2); for Hayles, “becoming posthuman both evokes terror and excites pleasure” (*How* 283). Similarly, Herbrechter and Callus argue that like a “spectre,” the “posthuman ‘other’” is “understood as threat or promise” and conceived as “a product of human anxiety and desire” (97). Posthuman disruptions are repeatedly conceptualised in affective terms. Fantasies of becoming “other” than human are anxiously apprehended and transgressively yearned for.

There is an increasingly strong sense that the posthuman sits squarely in literary studies. The theoretical work performed by the posthuman is contingent upon its crystallisation in imaginative literature; the posthuman is a representational project as much as it is a question of theory. “What the posthuman presents in the first instance,” Clarke writes, is “an image, and, for the time being, a fictional and speculative image” (“Posthumanism”). The posthuman “image” differs from descriptions of the posthuman as a periodising term, such as “our posthuman historical condition” (Braidotti 6) and an “impending historical circumstance” (Callus, Herbrechter and Rossini 107). It is not my intention to dismiss these periodising interpretations, but rather to renew critical attention to how changing ideas of the human are produced and valorised by representation. Novels both reflect and construct the world. Literature shapes the human through “representational practices,” as Elaine L. Graham demonstrates: “particular portrayals or representations of what it means to be human ... are not simple reflections of events or objects ‘in the world’” (26). Rather, representation works “to legitimate, to

reproduce and to normalize; or to subvert, to contradict and destabilize” ideas of the human (26).

Representations of the posthuman in literature reveal the extent to which human status is violently contested within cultural forms. Herbrechter and Callus catalogue how the posthuman other “takes shape in figures and representations which tap into the long history of humanity’s excluded (the inhuman, the non-human, the less than human, the superhuman, the animal, the alien, the monster, the stranger, God ...)” (97). The human enjoys a privileged position in imaginative fiction, and yet the political value of literature’s proliferating images of posthuman otherness remains underexplored. Novels expose the collateral of normative human privilege’s long history in ways that theory and philosophy cannot.

Before proceeding any further, I want to mark an important distinction between the posthuman and posthumanism. Callus, Herbrechter and Manuela Rossini helpfully articulate both the difference and the relation between the two. They explain that posthumanism is “a distinct and cogent discourse and form of practice” (105) whereas the posthuman, in its periodising sense, names “an entity or state coming after the human that is either to be feared or embraced” (107). Clarke makes a similar point, distinguishing between posthumanism’s “contested set of doctrines” and the posthuman’s manifestation as an imaginative “image” or representation (“Posthumanism”). This distinction is often muddled or overlooked entirely by scholarship, contributing to the confusion and lack of consensus endemic to this area of scholarship.

To clarify my own position, this thesis deploys posthumanism as a critical paradigm that takes decentred human subject positionality as its primary object of knowledge and critique. In particular, posthumanism is optimally positioned to read

representations of the posthuman. The two exist in a relation of critical reading. For instance, Callus, Herbrechter and Rossini argue that “criticism needs to determine the posthumanist value of any instantiation of the posthuman and the various constructions that are made of its coming, origins and ends” (107). For them, “posthumanism is the discourse that more or less critically investigates the figure of the posthuman” (111). Similarly, Clarke asserts that the “distinction between posthumanist doctrine and posthuman image clarifies the circumstance that criticism must determine the posthumanist value of any given image of the posthuman” (“Posthumanism”). Clearly, the relation between posthumanism and the posthuman is resolutely discursive; they are connected through critical practices of reading and interpretation.

Posthumanism is “neither monolithic nor uncontested” as a critical paradigm (Callus, Herbrechter and Rossini 104; see also Braidotti 2; Callus and Herbrechter, “Introduction” 243; Clarke, “Posthumanism”; Giffney and Hird 3-4; Haraway and Wolfe 261-62). As is typical of politically motivated criticism, posthumanist scholarship is rife with anxiety, particularly in regards to theoretical work proceeding in a properly posthumanist direction.¹ As a contested framework, posthumanism

¹ For example, as I discuss later in this chapter, Noreen Giffney and Myra J. Hird diagnose the posthuman and posthumanism with an exceptionalism very similar to that of the human and humanism (3-4). Their wariness for both the posthuman and posthumanism is symptomatic of a trend in posthumanist theory more broadly. Critical work on posthumanism frequently displays a kind of anxiety for “doing” posthumanism incorrectly, with theorists’ work punctuated by pointing out where others have lost their “proper” posthumanist direction. Along with Giffney and Hird, other examples might include Wolfe’s critique of Hayles’ posthuman of “triumphant disembodiment” (Wolfe, *Posthumanism* xv) and Colebrook’s tongue-in-cheek diagnosis of posthumanism in general: posthumanism is “bad” whereas

“needs theory, needs theorizing, needs above all to reconsider the untimely celebration of the absolute end of ‘Man’” (Badmington, “Theorizing” 10). Bart Simon notes an “unproductive confusion” in these debates about the posthuman and posthumanism, and distinguishes between “popular posthumanism” and “a more critical posthumanism” (2). Herbrechter makes a similar distinction between “a fashionable popular posthumanism” and “a serious and philosophical one” (22). Popular posthumanism operates “as a legitimating narrative for new social entities (cyborgs, artificial intelligence, and virtual societies) composed of fundamentally fluid, flexible, and changeable identities” (Simon 2). Jeff Wallace suggests this strand of posthumanism is best “typified” by Francis Fukuyama, who imagines the posthuman as “a condition of threat” where “invasive new technologies” challenge “the integrity of human nature” (Wallace 692). “From this generally reactionary position,” Wallace writes, the “posthuman denotes a new postlapsarianism, a contemporary version of the Fall in which the sciences of genetics, neurology, cybernetics and informatics are seen to interfere with an otherwise pristine state of human nature and freedom” (692). In its ostensibly reactionary position, popular posthumanism maintains the illusion of a pristine and normative human condition that modern humankind has carelessly lost.

Critical posthumanism, on the other hand, “must be seen as a way of *thinking* the human” (Wallace 692 emphasis in original). In his landmark publication of critical posthumanism, *What is Posthumanism?* (2010), Wolfe writes:

we are not just talking about a thematics of the decentering of the human in relation to either evolutionary, ecological, or technological coordinates

“inhumanism” and “nonhumanism” are “good” (“Post-Anthropocene”; see also Weinstein and Colebrook).

(though that is where the conversation usually begins and, all too often, ends); rather, I will insist that we are also talking about *how* thinking confronts that thematics, what thought has to become in the face of those challenges. (xvi emphasis in original)

For Wolfe, this philosophical confrontation is contextualised by a sense of posthumanism that “comes both before and after humanism” (xv). Critical posthumanism takes into account “the embodiment and embeddedness” of human life that historically precedes humanism (Wolfe xv). Critical posthumanism analyses the human within “its biological but also its technological world” and considers “the prosthetic coevolution of the human animal with the technicity of tools and external archival mechanisms (such as language and culture)” (Wolfe, *Posthumanism* xv). But, as Wolfe explains, posthumanism clearly comes after humanism as well. The posthumanist critique of humanism’s legacy is historically situated; posthumanism “names a historical moment in which the decentering of the human ... is increasingly impossible to ignore” (Wolfe xv). In this way, the “historical development” of posthumanism “points toward the necessity of new theoretical paradigms (but also thrusts them on us), a new mode of thought that comes after the cultural repressions and fantasies, the philosophical protocols and evasions, of humanism as a historically specific phenomenon” (xv-xvi). Critical posthumanism is deeply engaged with its philosophical and historical relation to humanism.

Critical posthumanism provides literary studies with an analytical framework for examining the complexities and contingencies of human subject positionality in texts, as Herbrechter and Callus explain (see the next section of this chapter). The scope of this framework, which accounts for the “before and after” of humanism, draws attention to the human’s entanglement with the more-than-human world. It is

this entanglement that humanism conceals through its philosophical ideal of the human subject.

The posthuman enters the philosophical fray as a thought experiment. Its textual representations are drawn to and intensify the fault lines running through anthropocentrism, which critical posthumanism seeks to expose. The posthuman is “implicated in the ongoing critique of what it means to be human” (Simon 8), which means that “a critical posthumanism must be willing to live with the ghosts of humanism” (5). This sense of posthumanism has gained significant traction, indicated by developments in the field such as the University of Minnesota Press’s *Posthumanities* book series (edited by Wolfe) and the establishment of the *Critical Posthumanism Network*, an attempt at consolidating cutting-edge posthumanist scholarship. As Wallace describes, critical posthumanism’s critique is twofold: “both of an essentializing conception of human nature, and of human *exceptionalism*” (692 emphasis in original). Moreover, posthumanism is clearly part of the nonhuman turn in philosophy and theory, with Catherine Waldby describing critical posthumanism as “a general critical space in which the techno-cultural forces which both produce and undermine the stability of the categories of ‘human’ and ‘nonhuman,’ can be investigated” (43). Imagining the posthuman is central to my posthumanist investigation.

Neither posthumanism’s project, nor its critical value, lies solely within the borders of theory. For literary studies, posthumanism’s deconstruction of the human/nonhuman binary is understood as a discursive phenomenon. As Wallace writes, it is “generally characterized by discourses of the dissolution or blurring of the boundaries of the human, whether conceptual and philosophical (as in the ‘decentring’ of the human in 20th-century structuralist and poststructuralist thought)

or scientific and technological (as in biotechnologies, genetics and cybernetics)” (692-93). Posthumanism and the posthuman, as this thesis argues, are jointly invested in practices of reading and the anthropocentric concepts underpinning such textual pursuits. If critical posthumanism is a way of “thinking” the human, then it is also a way of “reading” the human. Posthumanism asks: what is the value—posthumanist or otherwise—of telling stories about a deranged and unfamiliar human ontology? (Callus, Herbrechter and Rossini 107). Posthumanism needs to reappraise the proliferating ideas of the human in crisis at the beginning of the twenty-first century by turning to how novels—privileged sites of human representation and stories—reimagine human identity.

Critical posthumanism recognises the human as a historical occurrence with a traceable genealogy. As Wolfe notes, posthumanism entered serious critical debates in the humanities and social sciences in the mid-1990s, but its “roots” extend much further back through nascent cybernetics and systems theory from the 1940s and 1950s (*Posthumanism* xii). To emphasise the historical and discursive dependency of the human, Wolfe singles out Michel Foucault’s notorious closing remarks in *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1970). Foucault writes that “fundamental arrangements of knowledge” across history (387) have “made it possible for the figure of man to appear” (386). From the vantage point of contemporary posthumanism, and emergent, cognate areas of research focusing on extinction and the Anthropocene, it is tempting to regard Foucault as prophet of the posthuman. He writes:

As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end. If those arrangements [of knowledge] were to disappear as they appeared, if some event of which we can at the

moment do no more than sense the possibility—without knowing either what its form will be or what it promises—were to cause them to crumble, ... then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in the sand at the edge of the sea. (*Order* 387)

Foucault's analysis provides the genealogical scope and historical scale from which to regard the human as a discursive "invention." This is where Wolfe's reading of Foucault's passage ends: with "the historical appearance of this thing called 'man'" from discourse (Wolfe, *Posthumanism* xii). However, Foucault's description of the approaching disappearance, erasure and crumbling "end" of "man" unwittingly evokes the posthuman. The posthuman dismantles "Man" as a grand narrative of the human. Historically, the white heterosexual able-bodied wealthy male has enjoyed disproportionate access to the category of the human, the destabilisation of which the posthuman celebrates.

Foucault's human "end" also suggests a future of human extinction. Ideas of extinction and a future beyond anthropocentric conceptualisations of life have been taken up by scholarship on extinction and the Anthropocene, speculative realism and object-oriented ontology. This revitalisation of scholarly interest in a world without humans reappropriates the posthuman in a literal sense for theory and philosophy. This extinctive version of the posthuman is becoming indispensable to contemporary posthumanist thought. While previously refracted through the alien, the cyborg and the animal (Heise, "Posthuman" 455), the posthuman has recently taken on a geological register in the face of extinction and the Anthropocene. As a speculative thought experiment of the world after humankind, the posthuman is decipherable in Foucault's sandy human inscription and discernible as a lithic scar in the planet after human extinction.

Critical posthumanism is resolutely committed to the description and explication of a critical ontology of the human. As Hebrechter puts it, “a critical posthumanism stands for a postanthropocentric (post)anthropology with its promise of a non-normative description of the human and its others” (106). The posthuman ruptures what Graham terms the “ontological hygiene” distinguishing “human from non-human, nature from culture, organism from machine, binary pairings whose mutual purification is complicit in the discourses of modernity” (35). This regulatory process has legitimated the notion of a “normative humanity” born of “exclusive definitions and watertight categories” (Graham 35). Critical engagements with the posthuman re-read this legitimating narrative of the human and deconstruct the human subject’s “supreme ontological entitlement” (Braidotti 68).

Haraway’s theorisation of the cyborg has proven formative to posthumanism’s critical ontology of the human. A staple of posthumanist thought, Haraway’s cyborg—a fusion of flesh and machine—has functioned as an exemplary posthuman figure since the publication of her highly influential essay, “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century” (1985).² Haraway’s “ironic political myth” heralds a constitutive posthuman ontology for modern humanity (149): “By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs. The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics” (150).

² The manifesto was originally published as “Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s” in the *Socialist Review* journal. Renamed a few years later as “A Cyborg Manifesto,” this often-anthologised essay forms part of Haraway’s *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (1991) and more recently, in Haraway’s collaboration with Wolfe, *Manifestly Haraway* (2016).

Nicholas Gane traces the mid-1990s “explosion” of interest in the posthuman to the manifesto (431) and Wolfe names the manifesto as a “locus classicus” of posthumanist thought (*Posthumanism* xiii). However, Haraway makes no mention of the term “posthuman” in the manifesto (Gane 431) and, more recently, has distanced herself from posthumanism itself (*When* 19; *Manifestly* 261-62).

The cyborg emerges from the breakdown of three binaries central to “the sanctity of ‘the human’” (Gane 431): human/animal, organism/machine, and physical/non-physical (Haraway, “Cyborg” 151-53). The human is no longer the pure subject it believes itself to be; the human’s thorough integration with advancements in technology and medicine “have made cyborgs of us all” (Carpenter 199). The cyborg represents a profound challenge to the human’s privileged subject positionality and its presumption of ontological safety: “Cyborg figures—such as the end-of-the-millennium seed, chip, gene, database, bomb, fetus, race, brain, and ecosystem—are the offspring of the implosions of subjects and objects and of the natural and artificial” (Haraway, *Modest* 12). Subverting anthropocentrism, the cyborg’s project is “completely without innocence” as it collapses distinctions between nature and culture, and between the human and nonhuman (Haraway, “Cyborg” 151).

Boundaries, binaries and bodies are crossed, deconstructed and breached; the cyborg relishes a total lack of anthropocentric “ontological hygiene,” to borrow Graham’s phrase again.

Posthumanism and contemporary iterations of the posthuman revel in the aftermath of Haraway’s cyborg. Noting the “various mixings, hybridizations, and impurities that accompany contemporary bodily forms,” Chen recognises the legacy and continuing influence of the cyborg in the recent turn to life in contemporary biopolitics: “What, indeed, becomes of life now that Haraway’s vision has in some

regard prevailed?” (193). Chen writes that the manifesto “has proved eerily prescient in its view of the ever-seamless integration of machines, humans, animals, and structures of capital” (193). Understanding the body becomes particularly complex, given that the nonhuman has always been materially imbricated in the human. Haraway explains how bacteria naturally inhabit human guts and exist in a symbiotic relationship with their human hosts, turning humans into “ecosystems” of companion species (“Encounters” 112; *When* 3-4; 31). Chen pursues the imbrication of the human through a consideration of “toxic” bodily contamination: “Human bodies, those preeminent containers of life, are themselves pervaded by xenobiotic substances and nanotechnologies” (193). A critical ontology of the human reveals the human to be a creature of prosthesis and “cosubstantiating contingencies” (Chen 193), which runs counter to the liberal humanist narrative of a human subject defined by its autopoietic capacity for self-definition and mastery of a nonhuman world from which it remains separate.

While the human and the nonhuman have always been imbricated in a material sense, this occurs linguistically as well. This is exemplified by humankind’s development of language systems, as Wolfe explains: “the human is itself a prosthetic being, who from day one is constituted *as* human by its coevolution with and coconstitution by external archival technologies of various kinds—including language itself as the first archive and prosthesis” (*Posthumanism* 295 emphasis in original). Language, previously regarded as that which distinguished humans from other animals, is yet another means of exposing how the human is divided from itself and its presumption of ontological purity. Humankind’s primary epistemological method—language, whether speech or writing, crafted into text—becomes further evidence of its cyborg-like, posthuman construction.

Alterity continues to be fundamental to theories of the posthuman, typified by posthumanism's indebtedness to animal studies and disability studies. In particular, critical iterations of the posthuman and posthumanism are very much twenty-first-century concepts shaped by the emergence of animal studies and disability studies, and their driving ethical imperatives. Indeed, the twenty-first-century posthuman and critical posthumanism demonstrate these ethical imperatives in ways that earlier, more technological posthuman contexts do not.

Animal studies and disability studies signal profound challenges to the traditional human subject, as Wolfe points out in his framing of critical posthumanism. He writes:

part of what makes animal studies significant (and disability studies is no different in this respect) is that it poses fundamental challenges ... to a model of subjectivity and experience drawn from the liberal justice tradition and its central concept of rights, in which ethical standing and civic inclusion are predicated on rationality, autonomy, and agency. That agency, in turn, is taken to be expressive of the intentionality of one who is a member of what Kant called 'the community of reasonable beings'—an intentionality that is taken to be more or less transparent to the subject itself. (*Posthumanism* 127)

Wolfe demonstrates the inadequacies of the humanist model of subjectivity and its narrowly defined parameters. The question of “who or what comes ‘after’ the subject as it is modeled in liberal humanism” is a thoroughly posthumanist one that goes beyond the purview of the exclusively human (Wolfe, *Posthumanism* 127): “In the wake of this ‘after,’ new lines of empathy, affinity, and respect between different forms of life, both human and nonhuman, may be realized in ways not accountable, either philosophically or ethically, by the basic coordinates of liberal humanism”

(127-28). Haraway has embraced the turn to the animal but actively distanced herself from posthumanism. “I am not a posthumanist,” she writes in *When Species Meet* (2008): “I am who I become with companion species, who and which make a mess out of categories in the making of kin and kind. Queer messmates in mortal play, indeed” (19).³ Although she describes cyborgs as “a kind of companion species” (133), her theorisation of companion species is firmly oriented towards the intimate process of “becoming with” nonhuman species (19) including her favoured example of her dog, Cayenne Pepper.

Jacques Derrida’s famous encounter with his cat dramatises the significance of the nonhuman animal to the construction of the human subject. Derrida exits the shower and is “caught naked, in silence, by the gaze of an animal, for example, the eyes of a cat” (*Animal* 3-4). This encounter, Nicole Shukin writes, is “charged” with a kind of spectrality (36). For Derrida, the scene is an “*animalséance*” and the cat’s stare is “[t]he gaze of a seer, a visionary or extra-lucid blind one” (4 emphasis in original). The spectral nature of the nonhuman other suggests that the animal is not really present, but is rather a haunting visitation to human ontology—despite Derrida’s insistence that he is talking about “a real cat” rather than “the *figure* of a cat” (6 emphasis in original). As Shukin observes, a similar figuration of the animal can be seen in John Berger’s critique of “the marginalization of animals in capitalist modernity” (33). For Berger, the animal is positioned as a kind of originary metaphor for forms of visual representation: “The first subject matter for painting was animal. Probably the first paint was animal blood. Prior to that, it is not unreasonable to

³ In *Manifestly Haraway*, Haraway describes herself as “in alliance and disalliance” with posthumanism (261).

suppose that the first metaphor was animal” (253). The figurative animal, or the absence of any real animal, precipitates representational forms for the human.

A comparable notion of more-than-human haunting can be found in Herbrechter and Callus’s description of “the spectre of posthumanism” (97). Elsewhere, Herbrechter elaborates the human’s “ghostly ontology” to describe how the decentring of the human is tied to the return of “its repressed ‘mirror images’ of identity” (29). This “teratology”—“the creation of monsters, the representation of monstrosity, inhumanity, animality, objectification, fetishization but also spiritualization and religion”—reinscribes difference in ways that uphold and destabilise human subjectivity (29). For Derrida, encountering the animal is central to the construction of human difference, but also, as Shukin argues, this “deeply ethical encounter [is] capable of dislocating the composure and presumed priority of the human subject” (37). “As with every bottomless gaze,” Derrida writes, “as with the eyes of the other, the gaze called ‘animal’ offers to my sight the abyssal limit of the human” (12). From this “vantage,” the human “dares to announce himself to himself” and philosophy emerges (12): “The animal looks at us, and we are naked before it. Thinking perhaps begins there” (29).

Disability studies also pose a thoroughly posthumanist critique of the humanist model of subjectivity. The discourse surrounding disability emphasises “the right of the disabled to subjectivity of a particular and circumscribed type: subjectivity as *agency*” (Wolfe, *Posthumanism* 138 emphasis in original). The humanist and masculinist overtones of this discourse, which articulates an active subject position, becomes further apparent in Cora Kaplan’s analysis of feminism and disability. She argues that “human anomaly ... continues to trouble the rhetoric of liberal individualism, testing both its ethics of tolerance and its fetishization of

autonomy and agency as conditions of human status and civic participation” (303). Margrit Shildrick suggests that the disruptive power of disability, especially when readily visible upon the body, reflects “the extraordinary significance of human corporeality” (*Dangerous* 1). Disability’s capacity to “unsettle” Western conceptions of subjectivity reveal the violently policed borders of the properly human: “What is it about the variant morphology of intra-human difference,” Shildrick asks, “that is so disturbing as to invoke in the self-defined mainstream not simply a reluctance to enter into full relationship, but a positive turning away and silencing of the unaccepted other?” (1). This kind of ethical and political violence against less-than-human others is legitimated by “hostile normativities” ready to fetishise and exclude noticeably different bodies (Shildrick 175).

According to Shildrick, the posthuman reframes disability. Western culture’s fixation on the disabled other’s “anomalous embodiment” (*Dangerous* 1) and reliance on “an ethics based on the distinction between bodies” (174) gives way, for Shildrick, to an “ethics of contact and touch” (174). Shildrick asserts that “it becomes increasingly implausible that in the era of the posthuman, differences in corporeality could serve as any justificatory ground for exclusion and oppression” (173). Shildrick’s interpretation of the posthuman—as an articulation of a hopeful ethics and a deconstruction of the ability/disability binary—is decidedly utopian in its regard for the future of the non-normative body. However, her suggestion of moving towards the dimensions of “contact and touch” opens further avenues for a posthumanist critique of the properly embodied human.

Two significant examples of this kind of critique come from Temple Grandin and Chen, whose writing intersects critical theory and autobiography. Wolfe prefaces his explication of the writings of Grandin by identifying a “small subfield” of critical

work that unites both animal studies and disability studies, in which the authors' own "condition" equips them with a non-anthropocentric understanding of nonhuman animals and their experiences (*Posthumanism* 128). Grandin is an academic with autism and is perhaps best known for her work designing "one-third of all the livestock-handling facilities in the United States" (Wolfe, *Posthumanism* 128). Grandin's autism equips her with an intensely visual and tactile experience of the world. With technical metaphors, she describes how she "think[s] in pictures" which in turn allows her a specific way of relating to animals, "because animals are visual creatures, too" (*Animals* 17). "I would be denied the ability to think by scientists who maintain that language is essential for thinking," she writes (*Thinking* 186). Grandin's "visual prowess" functions as "an index of *disability*" rather than its stereotypical expression "of the humanist *ability* to survey, organize, and master space," which Wolfe traces through the "canonical expression" of Western philosophy from the Renaissance to the twenty-first century (Wolfe 130 emphasis in original).⁴

Grandin's visuality, rather than indexing her human privilege, constructs her as a posthuman subject. Anthropocentric mastery is subverted by Grandin's story, in which "visuality may be animal, it may be technical, but it is *anything but* 'human'" (Wolfe, *Posthumanism* 131 emphasis in original). Wolfe is particularly drawn to Grandin's account of using the livestock-handling machine she designed. Grandin's story breaches the boundaries between the human, the nonhuman animal and the metallic chute holding the animal before its slaughter. Grandin acts through the

⁴ Wolfe cites a range of examples including "tropes ranging from the Renaissance theory of perspective, to Freud's parsing of the evolutionary sensorium in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, through Sartre's discussion of the Gaze, to Foucault's panopticon, and finally to the various contemporary modes of electronic surveillance culture" (*Posthumanism* 130).

machine and forms an intensely intimate relation with the animal: “Through the machine, I reached out and held the animal. When I held his head in the yoke, I imagined placing my hands on his forehead and under his chin and gently easing him into position. Body boundaries seemed to disappear” (*Thinking* 25). In Wolfe’s analysis, this remarkable scene deconstructs disability and species difference through crossing “the organic and inorganic, the biological and mechanical” (136). Grandin’s disability becomes “the *positive*, indeed *enabling*, condition” for providing care for an animal, in whose death Grandin becomes intimately involved (Wolfe 136 emphasis in original).

Anat Pick cites “serious misgivings” about Grandin’s relationship with animals and draws attention to Wolfe’s problematic deferral of “essential ethical questions” pertaining to Grandin and animals (65). She argues that Grandin’s story of an autistic mind “becoming transparent to itself ... quickly turns into a tale of betrayal” (66). While Grandin’s story is undoubtedly “about the *enabling* power of *disability*,” it also about how her heightened ability to relate to animals “allows her to enter into their midst like a spy” (66 emphasis in original). Pick criticises Wolfe for skipping over “fundamental” questions raised by Grandin’s account about “the relationship between subjectivity and ethics, about the industry Grandin is involved in, and about our own relationship to the masses of animals killed by that industry” (66). After all, Grandin’s disability—traditionally a dehumanising form of difference—is essential to her complicity in killing nonhuman others.

Wolfe argues that Grandin’s story represents a “dramatization of the category meltdowns identified canonically in ... Haraway’s ‘Cyborg Manifesto’” (*Posthumanism* 136). Grandin’s “disability ... positively makes a mess of the conceptual and ontological coordinates” that discern the human from all others

(Wolfe 136). Grandin's cyborg-like body blends with the animal she holds with a machine that becomes "an extension" of her hands (*Thinking* 25). Wolfe compares his analysis of Grandin's animal handling with her account of a childhood experience at her aunt's farm. She recalls witnessing how cattle receiving vaccinations would relax when "pressed" within a "squeeze chute," and asks her Aunt Ann to squeeze her in the machine when she has a panic attack (*Thinking* 59). The tactility and pressure of the chute is profoundly calming for Grandin, who feels "really comfortable in [her] own skin" for the first time (59). In its way, the killable animal body that Grandin mechanically cradles is also her own. Her non-normative human body becomes uncannily like the body of a nonhuman animal. Through their mutual vulnerability, both bodies implicitly critique the human's historically legitimated masculine form.

Disability clearly uncovers the inadequacies of human-centric frameworks of subjectivity and intimacy. Chen examines recent critical interest in "the toxic ecology of the human body" (189) to enter "the terrain of the autobiographical" with particular attention to intimacy and disability (197). Chen's obscure condition of "multiple chemical sensitivity" and "heavy metal poisoning" shapes her subjectivity and capacity for relationships with others (197). She writes that disability has "queerly and profoundly changed my relationship to intimacy" (197). Her conceptualisation of toxicity captures her non-anthropocentric orientation in intimate relationships, which frequently exceed the conventions of human sociality and constructions of love. Her "toxic" body draws attention to the constitutive presence of the nonhuman in the human; childhood mercury poisoning and intense sensitivity to chemicals in the environment denaturalise and contaminate her body.

Chen's body breaches dominant constructions of the contemporary body's immunity and anthropic purity. Toxicity is "understood as an *unnaturally* external

force that violates (rather than informs) an integral and bounded self” (Chen 194 emphasis in original). As Chen points out, toxic disability threatens to invade what Ed Cohen calls the “apotheosis of the modern body” (25) and the internalised responsibility, “even privatization,” of human bodily integrity (Chen 194). Disability, as theorised by Chen, subsequently calls to mind Judith Butler’s criticism of “an ontology of individualism,” which remains blinkered by “the discrete ontology of the person” and fails to recognise “the interdependency of persons” (*Frames* 19). The disabling force of toxicity breaches the “radical segregation of self and world” and reveals the interdependency of all bodies as porous materialities threatened by external contamination (Chen 194-95). In this sense, disability challenges established ideas of discrete personhood.

This is nowhere more apparent than in Chen’s description of her radically inhuman experience of intimacy. In the midst of “a toxic period,” Chen describes lying on the couch as her partner arrives home (202). She is unable to converse with or look at her partner and flinches at her touch. During this heightened state of her condition, the ontological distinctions that enable Chen to organise the world melt away: “whether it’s my cat or a chair or a friend or a plant or a stranger or my partner, I think they are, and remember they are, all the same ontological thing” (202). Chen’s description of her experience enacts a disruption to the anthropocentric framing of human intimacy. She is unable to distinguish between her lover’s body and the couch upon which she reclines; queer lover and furniture become intimately entwined:

And I am shocked when her body does not reflect that I have snuggled against it earlier, when the snuggling and comforting happened in the arms and back of my couch. What body am I now in the arms of? Have I performed the inexcusable: Have I treated my girlfriend like my couch? Or have I treated my

couch like her, which fares only slightly better in the moral equations? (202)

Through intimacy, Chen breaches the binaries of human and nonhuman, organic and inorganic. Her toxic intimacy subverts Graham's ontological hygiene of the human and elaborates Shildrick's posthuman ethics of contact and touch.

Chen's condition disrupts her purchase upon human loving relations. She reflects that "it is only in the recovering of my human-directed sociality that the couch really becomes an unacceptable partner" (203). Her disability not only produces a posthuman subject position, but also establishes the queerness of her inhuman orientation towards the couch. As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen outlines in his theorisation of stone as active matter (sharing affinities with Chen's own examination of how heavy metal invades subjectivity), the inhuman signifies both "catastrophe" and "companionship" for the human (*Stone* 10). The term "inhuman" emphasises "both difference ('in-' as negative prefix) and intimacy ('in-' as indicator of estranged interiority)" (10). Chen closes her couch/lover vignette in a way that recalls Wolfe's insistence on the "fundamentally posthumanist set of coordinates" produced by the intersection of animal studies and disability studies (*Posthumanism* 127). Chen's final musings on the materiality of the couch radically shrink the ontological distance between her human lover and the couch's animal origin, for "the couch is made of mammalian skin" (203). Chen's intimacy does not observe species boundaries, nor does it relate exclusively to bodies that are alive: "I have encountered an intimacy that does not differentiate, is not dependent on a heartbeat" (203). The couch's leathery "skin" and the living flesh of her lover are both animated by Chen through tactile intimacy and their coterminous animal history. Disability and animality exceed the narrowly defined human of the humanist tradition, demonstrating the need for other ways of thinking about subjectivity, agency and intimacy.

Reading the Posthuman: Literature, the Anthropocene, Biopolitics

“The claim we are making is very simple,” write Herbrechter and Callus: “It is possible to read ‘texts,’ in the widest sense attributed to this word by poststructuralism, through the way they set up a catalogue of assumptions and values about ‘what it means to be human’” (95). They describe posthumanism as a deconstructive reading practice that exposes the tensions between the human and the nonhuman. Herbrechter and Callus’s claim is deeply significant because it means that all texts conceptualise the human. Essentially, a posthumanist reading can be undertaken of any text of any historical period and need not be confined to those texts that share an obvious thematic affinity with the posthuman, such as science fiction and speculative fiction. A posthumanist reading practice is therefore highly self-reflexive and refuses to accept the human as a natural category; as Herbrechter and Callus contend, “it is the anxieties and desires involved in the process of drawing boundaries around the human and what may, or may not, be natural to it that become the object of critique” (96). Subsequently, they are able to ask a question that is critically “pertinent rather than ridiculous”: “How can one read in a manner that does not take ‘as read’ the humanity from which one reads?” (96). How can we read literature without taking for granted the human and its privileging framework of anthropocentrism?

I suggest that the necessity for such a decentring posthumanist reading practice is intensified by the new geological age of the Anthropocene, which harbours a highly normative and powerful version of the human. Dipesh Chakrabarty writes that the Anthropocene and anthropogenic climate change have redefined the human as “a force of nature in the geological sense” (“Climate of History” 207). This radical

change in the human condition means that humankind can now be thought of as a “nonhuman” global agent in a very real way (Chakrabarty, “Postcolonial” 11). Significantly, it is this destructive monolithic human subjectivity—the “anthropos” (Cohen and Colebrook 8)—that defines the Anthropocene. Although it ostensibly decentres humankind, the Anthropocene also enshrines a unifying conceptualisation of the human at its geological heart.

The problem of the Anthropocene’s anthropocentrism resonates with broader criticisms of a range of posthumanist theoretical frameworks, as Tom Cohen and Colebrook assert: “But all that talk about the post-human, the non-human, the inhuman and the problem of lumping all humans into the Anthropocene provides a way of sustaining the human as a problem” (11). For Cohen, the anthropocentrism of the Anthropocene is tied up with ideas of inscription and reading: “One gags on the ironies: the term ‘Anthropocene’ can only arrive in (or after) the *twilight* of what it names, so it can only anticipate or legitimize itself from a future recognition of it, after a disappearance it implies is accomplished. It projects a proleptic anterior ‘inscription’” (“Trolling” 23 emphasis in original). The geological remainder of the human is imagined through an act of future reading that takes place after human existence, as I examine in Chapter Six. The Anthropocene’s epochal legitimacy, and the version of the human coupled to it, rests upon the possibility of this gargantuan act of inscription and reading; human impact on the planet becomes “readable” in the planet’s bedrock after human extinction (Colebrook, *Death* 10). Cohen and Colebrook describe this idea as “unifying” their collaborative work on the Anthropocene: “there is no ‘we,’ no ‘anthropos’ until, in a final moment of inscribed and marked destruction, a species event appears by way of a specific geological framing” (9).

Thus, the Anthropocene “reads” the human from a literally post-human vantage, thereby producing the human into perpetuity on a geological and planetary scale.

Undeniably, reading the posthuman is not confined to literature. Cultural forms as diverse as film, television, comic books and art have all taken up questions of the posthuman. Theory, too, produces “stories” of the human and its decentring. Posthumanist theory risks producing “reactions formations” that safeguard the traditional human subject, which the Anthropocene exemplifies (Cohen and Colebrook 9). Deranging the human condition through geology unwittingly shores up a resilient and moral human narrative of survival. Cohen and Colebrook argue:

Not only has the narrative of humans as a destructive species generated the imperative to survive—if ‘we’ discover ourselves to be an agent of destruction, then ‘we’ must re-form, re-group and live on; the very critical motifs or idols that offered another way of thinking about the future became the means for a hyper-humanism. (9)

Posthumanist reading practices are required to confront the Anthropocene’s unifying and redemptive “narrative of humans,” which is more than a geological story; it is a cultural moment, as demonstrated by the textual analysis offered in this thesis. In its way, posthumanism proposes a kind of reading that seeks out the “stories” of the human told by theory and interrogates literature’s “theorising” of the human.

Reading the posthuman in literature is an underexplored area of scholarship. Wallace notes that while posthumanism “has begun to reconfigure the landscape of literary studies” (692), there remains lack of critical engagement with literary representations of the posthuman. He suggests, “in the critical domain, if ‘we have always been posthuman,’ then the potential to deploy the posthuman thinking of the human as a means of rereading the literary tradition still seems relatively unrealized”

(699). Wallace describes the history of literature, including the political deployment of the literary canon, as a repository of the traditional human subject: “it is important to identify in the definition of literature a historical legacy which associates it with the defence of *humanistic* conceptions of human integrity” (694 emphasis in original). In literature, the human finds a form of literary self-regard and a cultural perpetuation of the humanist subject’s plenitude.

Wallace is optimistic about “the application of posthumanism as a heuristic device to the wider literary field” (699). Wallace’s position is striking for its affinity with Herbrechter and Callus’s notion of posthumanism as a reading practice and the literary ambition they envisage for posthumanist theory. Wallace observes that “[c]urrent approaches seem constrained to the selection of authors whose work appears *amenable* to a philosophy of posthumanism” (699 emphasis in original). Similarly, Herbrechter and Callus are wary of posthumanist readings that remain too “easy” and ask, “how can a posthumanist reading be made less predictable to itself?” (98). They elaborate:

How, indeed, can a posthumanist reading resist the amiable amenability of certain texts: the very texts that, through their hospitality to the thought of a future whose conjugation may already be all too perfect, appear to script and remember in advance, and perhaps not all that unwittingly, posthumanism’s assimilation within theory’s miscellany? (98)

This resistance to predictable posthumanist texts is exemplified by Wolfe’s text selection in *What is Posthumanism?*, which ranges from Grandin’s books about disability and animals to a David Byrne and Brian Eno record. The sheer range of different forms examined by Wolfe speaks to the future of posthumanism as a dynamic and interdisciplinary critical framework.

Perplexingly, Wolfe's landmark work of posthumanist scholarship overlooks posthumanism in novels, despite showing that posthumanism inheres in all manner of texts. Nonetheless, Wolfe's demonstration of posthumanism's pervasiveness in texts goes some way to ameliorate Herbrechter and Callus's concern that posthumanist critique risks limiting its focus to texts that seek to "script" posthumanism in advance, such as science fiction and speculative fiction. While Herbrechter and Callus's text selection initially reflects an adherence to the posthumanist amenability of popular science fiction cinema—including *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*, *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, *Minority Report*, the *Matrix* and *X-Men* franchises, to name a few—their explication unsettles any straight-forward posthumanist interpretation. Their primary texts become unpredictable stories of the posthuman because, as Herbrechter and Callus persuasively demonstrate, they can be read as "impeccably humanist parables" (104). In short, both popular and literary texts perform surprising posthumanist work, and future posthumanist scholarship needs to recognise the whole gamut of the posthuman imagination.

Novels represent one of the most significant ways that culture has confronted the radical decentring of the human. Wallace singles out "the domain of imaginative print literature," and novels in particular, as central to "literature's continuing engagement with the posthuman" (699). Wolfe, too, is drawn to "the relationship ... between philosophical and artistic representationalism" in terms of how the human is imagined by forms of cultural expression such as contemporary art (*Posthumanism* 146 emphasis in original). Novels of the posthuman help us to dynamically think through the human and its relation with the more-than-human world. In this respect, novels of the posthuman actively engage with the significant problem of how to culturally and politically make sense of the human's decentring, which Wolfe

describes as the central challenge of critical posthumanism (*Posthumanism* xvi). Speculative and imaginative literary novels, such as those examined by this thesis, are thought experiments of the posthuman that give dramatic and overt expression to posthumanist questions. As this thesis demonstrates, novels represent a privileged and neglected site for reading the fruitful intersection of the figure of the posthuman and posthumanism's critical project.

In short, the posthuman and posthumanism need literature. To reiterate the grounding conviction of this thesis, posthumanism unites fiction and theory (Badmington, "Posthumanism," *Routledge Companion* 376). Boxall writes that while the human has emerged from humanism "as the basis of the social, the very condition, neither animal nor divine, of our [Western] cultural being" (85), culture is persistently attracted to the "fissile predicament" and "philosophical fragility" of the category of the human (85). Novels that dismantle human identity exemplify how "cultural forms have sought to adapt new ways of regulating subjectivity under [the] posthuman conditions" of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries (Boxall 90). Boxall points to "the ethical imperatives of the new novel," which signal "a concern with the stuff of which the body is made, stuff which has not disappeared under the regimes of late capitalism, but which circulates in a different form" (91). The "new novel" of the twenty-first century leads "the political promise of posthumanism" towards a renewed critique of the material conditions of the human body and its entangling with the nonhuman (91), as animal studies and disability studies have already convincingly shown.

Moreover, fiction has often asked explicitly posthuman questions that theory has overlooked. Questions of human extinction, heightened by the current climate crisis and the Anthropocene, are a key example of this theoretical oversight, as

Colebrook describes: “fiction and documentary culture have repeatedly asked the question that theory has failed to ask: why should the human species wish for or justify its prolongation, and what would be worth saving?” (*Death* 41-42).

Extinction’s posthuman thought experiment—imagining a world without humans—is demonstrably familiar territory in contemporary literary and popular culture. Many posthuman novels provide a way for humankind to “imagine its non-existence” and therefore imaginatively “adopt a relation to those whose miserable future will be ‘our’ legacy” (Colebrook, *Death* 42). However, the self-reflexive nature of such thought experiments demonstrates the impossibility of escaping anthropocentrism entirely; “our” miserable and extinct “legacy” is inevitably imagined from a human perspective and for a human readership or audience. Posthumanism must therefore recognise, and begin to read critically, such posthuman thought experiments, as the emerging area of extinction scholarship is beginning to do.

Pick advocates what she calls a “creaturely poetics” for reading cultural texts (5). She proposes that reading is instrumental not only in deconstructing the human/nonhuman binary but also for exposing culture itself as not exclusively human: “Reading through a creaturely prism consigns culture to contexts that are not exclusively human, contexts beyond an anthropocentric perspective. It recognizes in culture more than the clichéd expression of the ‘human condition’ but an expression of something *inhuman* as well” (5 emphasis in original). In this sense, posthuman novels operate in a “creaturely” fashion, reaching beyond and interrogating culture’s putative human coordinates. As Herbrechter and Callus point out, “to be ‘human’ necessarily implies its opposite, and helps set up or underscore hierarchies which in turn determine certain (accepted) ways of reading ‘as a human’” to such an extent that reading practices and the epistemological drive of cultural expression become

anthropocentrically blinkered (96). The “inhuman” dimensions of culture exceed the anthropocentrism that frames Western culture, the knowledges it produces and the reading practices it endorses.

Anthropocentric ways of reading emerge from a culture that codifies valuable life as human. This entrenched codification has determined not only how the intersection of life and politics has been examined by theory (namely biopolitics), but structurally underpins anthropocentrism’s expression in culture and politics. Novels of the posthuman are repeatedly drawn to this tightly bound determination of how different lives matter differently. Thus, as a reading practice, posthumanism can be employed to read fictional narratives as well as trends in critical theory that have responded to broadening conceptualisations of life in the twenty-first century. Biopolitics is an important example of how thinking about the value of life runs into immense problems when it comes to the question of species. As the recent turn to the animal in biopolitics demonstrates, biopolitical thought needs to look beyond traditional understandings of human life to confront the violence committed against those lives whose membership to the human species cannot save them from maltreatment and death. Novels of the posthuman work through the biopolitical problem of species and show culture’s role in exploring, shaping and reworking the material contingencies of human life.

Posthumanism demands a reassessment of biopolitics. A posthumanist critique of biopolitics deconstructs the human privilege that ostensibly accompanies species divisions between human and nonhuman animals. Posthumanism reveals the failures of “the discourse of species” (Wolfe, *Animal* 6), which ostensibly values life according to the human/nonhuman binary but in fact legitimates violence against both human and nonhuman lives. As Shukin puts it, what is required is “a different

trajectory of biopolitical—or, we might say, zoopolitical—critique, one beginning with a challenge to the assumption that the social flesh and ‘species body’ at stake in the logic of biopower is predominantly human” (9). Simply put, biopolitics names “a theory to make sense of the encounter between the concepts of ‘life’ and ‘politics’” (Campbell and Sitze, “Introduction” 2). From its seminal expression in the work of Foucault, biopower names “a technology of power centred on life” (*History* 144). Its emergence in the nineteenth-century describes a historical shift in Western human society, from the sovereign’s power over the life and death of their subjects to biopower’s pervasive control—its “quieter function” (Chrulew 140)—of “man-as-species” and a population to be regulated (Foucault, “Society” 63-64).

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri explain the difference between biopower and biopolitics: “the former could be defined (rather crudely) as the power over life and the latter as the power of life to resist and determine an alternative production of subjectivity” (“Biopolitics” 238). It is here that biopolitics begins to reveal the problems of its anthropocentric orientation toward exclusively human life. Biopower, as theorised by Foucault, names “nothing less than the entry of life into history, that is, the entry of phenomena peculiar to the life of the human species into the order of knowledge and power” (*History* 141-42), but Foucauldian biopolitics “bumps up against its own internal limit at the species line” (Shukin 11). The boundaries between species are far more fluid in the twenty-first century. Species difference, Shukin writes, is “a strategically ambivalent rather than absolute line, allowing for the contradictory power to both dissolve and reinscribe borders between humans and animals” (11), which substantially undermines the anthropocentrically narrow “biological continuum addressed by biopower” that Foucault initially outlined

(“Society” 74). Biopolitics is, thus, another avenue to a posthumanist critique of human ontology as a regularised norm.

Central to biopolitics’s problematic anthropocentrism is, as Shukin writes, that “biopolitical critique has largely bracketed the question of the animal” (12). The biopolitical “power of regularization” ostensibly ensures a degree of stability to human populations (Foucault, “Society” 67). Human populations, for example, are regularized by the biopolitical force of institutions such as healthcare systems, housing estates and the heteronormative family unit. Each of these examples becomes a mechanism of biopower for standardising and controlling a population. However as these examples make clear, biopolitics has traditionally been conceptualised “within the usual purview of anthropocentrism” (Wolfe, *Before* 52). As Wolfe argues, this is not to say that the biopolitical frame proceeds with the human/nonhuman animal distinction as “constitutive” or fundamental (“Poetics”), as if biopolitics and biopower are defined by their exclusion of all nonhuman animals. This exclusion is undeniably untenable in contemporary culture. For example, Shukin explores how recent global outbreaks of avian flu and mad cow disease are “symptomatic of how formerly distinct barriers separating humans and other species are imaginatively, and physically, disintegrating under current conditions of globalization” (46; see also Wolfe, *Before* 52). Clearly, as Wolfe writes, “[w]hat is needed, then, is another *thought* of the biopolitical in which human and nonhuman lives are deeply woven together” (*Before* 48 emphasis in original). The biopolitical frame must be expanded to reflect the real conditions of how biopower regulates bodies across species lines, which Wolfe characterises as a radicalisation of biopolitics (*Before* 52).

In explaining why some animals are treated better or worse precisely because they are animals, Wolfe argues that “the question here is not simply of the ‘animal’ as

the abjected other of the ‘human’ *tout court*, but rather something like a distinction between *bios* and *zoe*” (*Before* 54-55 emphasis in original). This distinction also shapes how lives are valued as human or less-than-human. According to Giorgio Agamben, life can be distinguished between *bios* as “the form or way of living proper to an individual or a group” and *zoē* as “the simple fact of living common to all living beings (animals, men, or gods)” (1). *Bios* lends itself to anthropocentrism, conceived by Agamben as “a qualified form of life” in contrast to the “natural reproductive life” of *zoē* (109). As novels of the posthuman illustrate, however, the human does not have complete purchase on *bios* and the power that affords. Certain forms of human life can be stripped of the anthropocentric privilege of *bios* and framed by the not necessarily human concept of *zoē*, even though they are ostensibly members of the human species.

As Shukin makes clear, there is “an inescapable contiguity or bleed between *bios* and *zoē*, between a politics of human social life and a politics of animality that extends to other species” (9). Agamben’s concept of “bare life” describes how some kinds of human life “may be killed and yet not sacrificed,” which is historically exemplified by the concentration camp (8). Shukin argues that the “zoopolitical supplement” to bare life is Derrida’s idea of the widespread “non-criminal putting to death” of nonhuman animals (Derrida, “Eating” 112) in “the modern industrial slaughterhouse” (Shukin 10). Following Derrida, Haraway points to a “logic of sacrifice” subtending how the animal is made killable (*When* 78). “Every living being except Man can be killed but not murdered,” she writes, just as posthumanism reveals that not all humans are included within that concept of “Man” or saved by such a sacrificial logic (78). She continues: “Sacrifice works; there is a whole world of those who can be killed, because finally they are only something, not somebody, close

enough to ‘being’ in order to be a model, substitute, sufficiently self-similar and so nourishing food, but not close enough to compel response. Not the Same, but Different; not One, but Other” (78-79). The fallibility of the human category is exhibited by what Shukin describes as “the power to reduce humans to the bare life of their species body” (10). From a humanist perspective, some forms of life are worth more than others and this distribution of worth is not solely contingent on the human/nonhuman binary.

From this humanist understanding, posthumanism and the posthuman become indispensable in order to move biopolitical thought forward. Animal otherness underpins the construction of race and racism in biopolitics, as Shukin demonstrates. Animality frequently legitimates constructions of racial minorities as less-than-human, so much so that their ontology breaches the species boundary that ostensibly contains them. Agamben, for instance, describes the condition of “bare life” as “a zone of indistinction and continuous transition between man and beast, nature and culture” (109). Examples abound: historically, racial hierarchies of Victorian social Darwinism saw the notion of “evolutionary progress” used to construct non-white peoples as less evolved and subhuman versions of the human species (McClintock 38; see also Chen 97; Shukin 6). More recently, as Shukin notes, photos emerged from Abu Ghraib prison in 2004 of “a naked Iraqi man on all fours, with a leash around his neck” clearly made to resemble a dog before his American military persecutors (10). As Heise points out, the animal has become central to a posthumanist understanding of otherness in the twenty-first century, after the earlier prominence of the alien and cyborg in the 1970s and 1980s (“Posthuman” 455).

Racist formulations of animalised non-white bodies are facilitated by the insecurity of the category of the human. According to Foucault, racism “subdivide[s]

the species” under biopower “into the subspecies known, precisely, as races” (“Society” 74). Shukin argues that Foucault’s reference to racial “subspecies” occludes and reveals “a species line” running through biopolitical determinations of racial human difference (10-11). Wolfe also recognises this: “you can’t talk about race without talking about species, simply because both categories—as history well shows—are notoriously pliable and unstable, constantly bleeding into and out of each other” (*Before* 43; see also 56). Braidotti writes that the intersection of race and species, and its biopolitical implications, are particularly salient in the twenty-first century: “Advanced capitalism and its bio-genetic technologies engender a perverse form of the posthuman. At its core there is a radical disruption of the human-animal interaction” (7). In a “vignette” of recent human history, Braidotti contrasts the fact that starving non-white people in war-torn Afghanistan have resorted to eating grass to survive (Nessman; see also Shaheen, Graham-Harrison and Wintour) when in Western countries, industrial agriculture has forced animals to become “cannibalistic” to satisfy the demand and appetite for meat (Braidotti 7). At the same time, the twenty-first century has seen “some animals ... receiving unprecedented levels of care” as Wolfe sets out: the American “pet care industry” grew from \$17 billion in 1994 to \$45.5 billion in 2009, and the more recent US “growth industry” of “pet health care insurance” was estimated to be worth \$500 million in 2012 (*Before* 53).

“What all this adds up to, of course,” writes Wolfe, “is a historically remarkable shrinkage in the gap between human beings and their animal companions regarding quality of life in areas such as food, health care, and other goods and services” (*Before* 53). Biopolitics can no longer be adequately conceptualised as privileging human life over the nonhuman world because, as Wolfe points out, “[c]learly, then, many animals flourish not in spite of the fact that they are ‘animals’

but *because* they are animals—or even more precisely, perhaps, because they are felt to be members of our families and our communities, regardless of their species” (54 emphasis in original). This “historically remarkable shrinkage” of the human/nonhuman divide indicates how the violence of the “discourse of species” exceeds its ostensible fixation on nonhuman animals (Wolfe, *Animal* 7). The “institution of speciesism,” defined as “the ethical acceptability of the systematic ‘noncriminal putting to death’ of animals based solely on their species” (Wolfe 7), is also deployed against forms of human life. As Wolfe writes, “[w]e all, human and nonhuman alike, have a stake in the discourse and institution of speciesism; it is by no means limited to its overwhelmingly direct and disproportionate effects on animals” (7). As long as it is permissible to put nonhuman animals to death “simply because of their species, then the humanist discourse of species will always be available for use by some humans against other humans as well, to countenance violence against the social other of *whatever* species—or gender, or race, or class, or sexual difference” (Wolfe 8 emphasis in original). The reach of speciesism has a decidedly posthumanist orientation. To be deemed improperly human—as novels of the posthuman explore—is to become violently expendable.

In reflecting upon “the limits of the nonhuman turn,” Grosz warns against taking too seriously the posthuman’s claims upon human subject positionality (“Interview” 23). She is concerned that interest in the posthuman will mean that the material conditions of the human are forgotten. Indeed this problem lies at the heart of the anthropocentrism of biopolitics, which allows us to conveniently forget the horrifying circumstances of some kinds of human and nonhuman life. Grosz writes:

The most obvious limit to focusing on the nonhuman is our convenient forgetting of our own location, here and now, as human—our implications in

the prevailing relations of power that regulate and police humans. Whatever nonhuman turn we may make, we must make it as (versions of) the human. The universe we inhabit, reaching to the furthest limits of our technically enhanced perception, remains a human universe to the extent that our bodies, sense-organs, and forms of reason and understanding, are through and through, human. We are not post-human beings even as the human, like all living things, continually evolves and may, sooner or later, render itself extinct. (“Interview” 23)

Grosz’s point that “we are not post-human beings” finds accord with Wolfe’s clarification of posthumanism as a critical framework that “isn’t posthuman at all—in the sense of being ‘after’ our embodiment has been transcended” (*Posthumanism* xv). Both Grosz and Wolfe anxiously warn against abandoning the human amidst the explosion of recent interest in the nonhuman turn. A critical analysis of the posthuman, however, is not interested in transcending the human; rather, it offers theory a way of cutting through culture’s inherent human biases, whether through a reinterpretation of Western biopolitical culture or rereading cultural expressions of the human in literature, art and cinema. The posthuman catalyses the necessity for such critical readings to take place within the sphere of literary studies, while the posthuman’s material effects—how might culture and politics do things differently if we took seriously the human’s radical decentering?—also warrant significant consideration.

Queering the Posthuman: Difference, Intimacy, Futurity

In the introduction to their edited collection *Queering the Non/Human* (2008), Noreen Giffney and Myra J. Hird are sceptical of “the posthuman” and “posthumanism.”

(This comes despite Giffney's later consideration of "the potential links between posthumanism and the 'doing' of queer" [57]). Explaining their choice to frame the collection with "'non/human' rather than 'post/human'," they write:

we are wary of privileging one epistemological term over another in case we displace one 'proper object' (the Human, Humanism) and in the process enact a new normative paradigm (the Posthuman, Posthumanism). This is not to claim that either humanism or posthumanism are inherently normative ... but rather to mention that too strong an investment in one *or* the other can have the potentially damaging effect of instantiating a new binary. (3-4 emphasis in original)

I read the potential for the posthuman and posthumanism to enable "a new normative paradigm" as a productive avenue for scholarship rather than a philosophical danger. What kind of normative framework might culture's rampant interest in the posthuman—as a popular figure in novels and films—make way for? This problem appears counterintuitive to the concept of the posthuman itself. I am fascinated by the idea that the posthuman, a concept ostensibly committed to a progressive and often radically deconstructive political critique of one of culture's most dominant concepts (to the point of a literal extinguishment of the species through extinction), could usher in a revived human exceptionalism.

The notion of a normative politics of the posthuman merits further attention from critical scholarship. Each of the novels read by this thesis points to the unnerving and persistent resilience of the human in posthuman narratives.

The textual analyses in the chapters to follow are informed by two interlinked senses of queerness. I am interested in queerness's more established relation to gendered and sexual identity politics as well as its increasingly important role within

the nonhuman turn. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick defines queer as “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlays, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or *can’t* be made) to signify monolithically” (*Tendencies* 8 emphasis in original). With theory’s expanded interest in the nonhuman world, Haraway argues that “[q]ueering has the job of undoing ‘normal’ categories, and none is more critical than the human/nonhuman sorting operation” (“Mis-recognition” xxiv)—an “operation” in which the posthuman also participates. Indeed for Giffney and Hird, the “encounter” between humanism and posthumanism staged by their anthology is “facilitated by the term ‘queer’” (4). Thus, as a tool for breaking apart the construct of the human, queer “comes to signify the continual unhinging of certainties and the systematic disturbing of the familiar” (Giffney and Hird 4); queerness “is an attempt,” Giffney and Hird argue, “to undo normative entanglements and fashion alternative imaginaries” pertaining to the nonhuman world (4). In particular, this thesis explores how contemporary fiction mobilises the figure of the queer posthuman, which unites both these deployments of queerness, to press upon the human in a range of ways.

The interrelation between humanness and sexuality goes to the heart of the posthuman’s inescapably queer force in contemporary novels and critical theory. Interrogations of the human frequently become interrogations of sex, gender, sexuality and desire, and vice versa. For example, consider Butler’s assertion that the “task” of gay and lesbian politics must be “a reconstituting of the human” (*Undoing* 30), or Luciano and Chen’s observation of queer theory’s indebtedness to a tradition of queer critique that interrogates “the nature of the ‘human’ in its relation to the queer” (186), or Leo Bersani’s far more radical conceptualisation of how “sexual intensities” threaten the human with disintegration (221). Literature’s proliferating

representations of posthuman queerness are especially important in the Anthropocene, which rearticulates the human as a monolithic figure intent on reproducing its normative intensity into the future. Fictions of the queer posthuman relentlessly question normative constructions of the human and articulate a politics of difference at a time when specific human differences are being de-politicised in the Anthropocene.

Giffney observes that “we might focus ... on the potential links between posthumanism and the ‘doing’ of queer” (57). For Giffney, these links raise “the question as to whether the act of queering is always already a posthuman endeavour and what that might mean for queer theory” (57). Halberstam and Livingston, for instance, assert that “being Queer in America is a posthuman agenda” (15). Late twentieth-century discourse surrounding AIDS, they argue, imagined the diseased body as a splintering techno-viral weapon that threatened “disintegration at large” for the mainstream population of healthy, “safe” bodies (15). Butler points out how few AIDS deaths became “publicly grievable losses” (*Precarious* 35). Grief, Butler writes, “establishes the limits of human intelligibility” (35). Ungrievable lives become less-than-human; as well as queer deaths, Butler considers the “unmarkable and ungrievable” AIDS deaths of non-white people in Africa (35), casualties of war in the Middle East (32, 34), and the deaths of people with disability (33). Butler’s posthumanist agenda, in which queerness plays a central role, is to undo the category of the human in order to remake it and include more people in it (33; *Undoing* 30).

By pressing against the boundaries between species, the posthuman queers the limits of permissible desire and sexual intimacy. Species categories cannot contain desire’s disruptive operations. The sexual narrative of humans regularly ignores the sexual interactions between humans and other species. Clear examples abound in

literature on humans and the domestication of animals, such as Haraway's idea of companion species as "queer messmates" (*When* 19). Susan McHugh describes a "queer spectrum of interspecies intimacies" whereby sentimentalised relations between humans and "promiscuous" pet animals "reflects and informs a distinctly 'unnatural' pairing" (117). McHugh explains how "the ideal of monogamous heteronormative couplings among humans" is strongly aligned with "the surgical mutilations of companion animals, who (like so-called aberrant or degenerate humans) are thus demonized for their sexuality even as they are spared the ultimate punishment administered to their unwanted brethren" (117; see also Chen 133-34). The sexual agency of "degenerate" humans and nonhumans threaten the monogamous ideal of heterosexual companionship. "Responsible" or "good" pet ownership generally demands the surgical neutering of animals, just as the heteronormative regulation of human sociality controls, denies and violently prohibits the sexuality of women, people with disability and non-heterosexual people.

Matthew Chrulew describes how breeding programmes for endangered species produce nonhuman lives "subjected to *too much* love: animals whose membership to an endangered species singles them out for intense intercession on the part of concerned scientists" (138 emphasis in original). Chrulew demonstrates how the administration of nonhuman "love" in twentieth- and twenty-first-century "zoological gardens" (139) is motivated and made possible "by our own purported love for the animals" (138). The biopolitical management of nonhuman bodies requires sexually invasive human involvement:

Members of endangered species are subjected to an increasingly intensive anatomo-politics of the animal body: regular testing, extraction of fluids, transportation, enforced tranquilisation, separation and recombination of social

groups, imposed breeding and the removal of offspring ... that is, veritable abduction and rape at the hands of their shepherds, with all the supposedly humorous sexual confusion this generates. Such is the nature of love at the zoo. (Chrulew 148)

Human “love” for vulnerable nonhumans legitimates the human’s sexual transgression of the species boundary. Sexual transgression acquires a moral imperative; the human must queerly breach its ontological purity and participate in animal reproduction to maintain its own humane narrative of ethical care for the nonhuman world. In a sense, these breeding programmes represent the redemption of the human in the Anthropocene; the restoration of endangered species goes some way toward ameliorating the destructive human impact on ecosystems. Chrulew contends that the discourse of cultivated animal “love” surrounding breeding programmes reveals “the bestialised underside of our own notion of romantic love based on free choice and culturally distanced from the directives of instinct” (138). Human love and sexual expression is thoroughly queered and shown its own nonhuman coordinates. The violence of such an ontological breakdown indicates yet again that the futurity of any species, human or otherwise, always attracts a violent cost. This queering of the human is fascinating because it forces nonhuman animals into heterosexual reproduction. This queer human love for the endangered animal is wholly committed to “the genetic body” of a species population and thereby permits the killing of “surplus” animal bodies who do not fit the desired genetic make-up (Chrulew 150). These excess nonhuman lives, produced by humankind’s desire for an Edenic ecological diversity, are “consigned to genetic irrelevance or collateral damage, tossed overboard the ark” (150). The dead collateral of species preservation symbolise

humankind's inability to save those other forms of life it professes to love and care for.

In the context of human extinction and futurity, the sexual anxieties surrounding the posthuman reflect anxieties of species survival. Non-reproductive posthuman bodies defy the heteronormative logic of human survival into the future. As a central part of the antisocial strand of queer theory, Lee Edelman's polemical critique of reproductive futurism describes a militantly heteronormative fantasy driving all politics. Edelman attacks the orientation of politics towards a normative future, which is protected and channelled through the figure of the child: "That Child remains the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention" (3). The "eternal sunshine of the spotless child" (Halberstam, *Queer Art* 108) ensures a perennially renewed future for a properly human polity. Edelman describes how reproductive futurism operates through

terms that impose an ideological limit on political discourse as such, preserving in the process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations. (2)

The future of the human is morally "vouchsafed" and populated through heterosexual reproduction because, as Rebekah Sheldon observes, "the social *good* appears co-terminus with human *futurity*" (emphasis in original). Successful reproduction becomes a moral victory of survival for humankind.

Reproductive futurism thus enshrines heterosexual reproduction as an indisputable good and positions non-reproductive sexuality on the side of extinction as "a globally destructive, child-hating force" (Edelman 112). Queerness, Edelman

writes, becomes a threat “so profound in its virulence to the species as to put into doubt ‘our collective future’” (112). Halberstam describes how resisting reproductive futurism means “routing our desires” around the symbolic child to find “the shady side of political imaginaries in the proudly sterile and antireproductive logics of queer relation” (*Queer Art* 108). The posthuman resides in this kind of political shade. Each of the novels examined in this thesis depict posthuman bodies that repeatedly neuter human futurity or reveal the queerness of human desire and its failure to remain within the confines of its own species. Posthumans are repeatedly denied reproductive futures of their own; they are unable to reproduce the child demanded by the heteronormative horizon of the political, and come to signify the extinct future of humankind.

Reproductive futurism’s symbolic child is protected by the human, in the sense of the “affective,” sympathetic human subject (Chen and Luciano 190). This version of the human is the *humane* ideal against the possibility of violence and the empathetic voice for equal rights among different human lives. Thus, to repudiate the child and the reproductive future it promises—as the queer posthuman, and the queer more broadly are called upon to do—shatters the heteronormative future, resists the normative construction of human community and reveals the failure of the affective discourse of the humane human. To insist, with Edelman, that “the future stops here” (31) refuses the endless deferral of the human as the apotheosis of an all-encompassing political, ethical and communal good.

Posthuman queerness helps to uncover the implicit coordinates and exclusions that have conventionally characterised queer theory’s focus. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen is critical of some domains of queer theory (including Edelman’s work) for “harbour[ing] a recurring and perhaps inescapable limit: anthropocentricity, an

unfolding of the world from a human point of view rather than a questioning from the start of how the human comes to be made, of why the category should so dominate that the universe must arrange itself around its small form” (“Queering” 151). The nonhuman turn applies pressure to the anthropocentrism of queer theory, for how could the human limit queer critique when “instability and fugitive vectors are in fact queer theory’s strengths” (Cohen 149)? It is odd, Cohen writes, that “a critical movement predicated upon the smashing of boundary should limit itself to the small contours of human form” (*Medieval* 40). Indeed, Edelman’s work has been criticised for quarantining itself to an “excessively small archive” of “queer negativity,” culturally narrow in scope and hopelessly male-centric in execution (Halberstam, “Politics” 824). Giffney asserts that while Edelman’s work on reproductive futurism advances feminist thought,⁵ it also operates “in a curious feminist-citational vacuum” (59-60). Theorisations of queerness therefore risk remaining sutured to a very specific version of the human—white and masculine—which is ironic, since queer theory should signal a fundamental displacement.

I present this analysis of the queer posthuman in fiction at a time when the Anthropocene and climate change have reframed humankind as a nonhuman, planetary agent. In this sense, the Anthropocene is the antithesis to the critical

⁵ Reviewing the “No Future Together” symposium held at King’s College London, Mark Fisher remarked of Edelman’s presentation, “it is women, not men, who are queered by reproductive futurism: scandalously, it remains the case that women are made to feel like failures if they do not reproduce. It may turn out, then, that the most productive use of Edelman’s ideas will occur in feminism.” Quarantining the queer force of reproductive futurism to women risks misappropriating the scope of Edelman’s polemic; his critique, after all, is of the political horizon governing all human sociality regardless of sex. However, the intersection of Edelman’s work and feminism is crucially important.

pressures applied to the human over the latter half of the twentieth-century. As Grosz writes, various modes of postmodern and poststructuralist thought have sought “to explain the constitution of man as a philosophical concept” (“Interview” 18), including feminist theory, postcolonial theory, critical race and whiteness studies, queer theory, disability studies and animal studies. Likewise, Colebrook reiterates that the “Anthropocene seems to override vast amounts of critical work in queer theory, trans-animalities, posthumanism and disability theory that had destroyed the false essentialism of the human” (“Anthropo” 91). The Anthropocene’s “return to ‘anthropos,’ now, after all these years of difference” marks a crisis for theory (Colebrook 91) and means that discussions of the Anthropocene can quickly become “a new point of refuge” for a unitary humankind (Cohen and Colebrook 15). In this respect, the Anthropocene glimmers with an axiomatic conviction of humanism itself: “Deep down ... we are all the same” (Badmington, “Posthumanism” 240).

There is something strangely neurotic about the Anthropocene’s geological shattering of the human’s ontological purity. If humans have now become nonhuman, they have done so through an anthropocentric epiphany of their destructiveness as a species. It is ironic that this radical decentring of the human—to the point of becoming geological and nonhuman—is achieved in no small way through an intensified focus on humans and their destructive relation to the nonhuman world. Moreover, fiercely contested debates over when to date the beginning of the Anthropocene concentrate on small discernible differences that are, importantly, geological, chemical, mineral and thoroughly nonhuman. The Anthropocene is marked by these relatively small displacements of nonhuman earth systems, which we neurotically read (and rightly so, whatever the irony) as a human story at a planetary scale.

“As far as stories go,” writes Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “the Anthropocene is not all that well plotted. Perilous assumptions attend its formulations” (“Posthuman”). As Cohen’s references to narrative—stories and plotting—suggest, the Anthropocene unites geology, inscription and reading, as I examine in greater detail in Chapter Six. Colebrook points out that the Anthropocene fetishises one huge difference as a kind of inscription: the mark of the human species upon the planet-made-text (*Death* 10). The human becomes textualised at a planetary, nonhuman scale. No longer regarded as purely nonhuman, the nonhuman world provokes what Clark describes as a “tendentious readability” (“Deconstruction” vi) and an “emergent unreadability” (*Ecocriticism* 63), and leads Eugene Thacker to declare, “[t]he world is increasingly unthinkable” (1) but also, increasingly difficult to narrate.

Reading at this gargantuan scale perverts the quarantining of the human and nonhuman. The scale of the Anthropocene makes it impossible to confine any act of deciphering meaning; whether it be interpreting the significance of a freak storm or reading a novel about an individual’s life, the Anthropocene threatens to turn reading practices into “intellectual containments” that preserve the line between human and nonhuman (Clark, *Ecocriticism* 58). As Clark argues, “human agency becomes, as it were, displaced from within by its own act, a kind of demonic iterability” (“Scale” 150). The Anthropocene’s geological scar of the human symbolises humankind’s desire for this obsessive iterability, whatever the cost. In the narrative of the Anthropocene, the human acknowledges its own extinct future and ecological impact only to continue finding evidence of itself—like a scar or inscriptive mark—in the earth of a literally post-human world. The Anthropocene demonstrates the difficulty of imagining the human with absolutely no future.

For my purposes, it becomes imperative to ask: what versions of the human do contemporary novels imagine in such a thoroughly posthumanist new century? I want to suggest that the planetary inscription of the human can be considered in concert with forms of the human inscribed by contemporary novels. How do novels, such as the fictional texts examined by this thesis, contribute to the broader ideological project of human representation and readability? The ecological ferocity of the human in the Anthropocene heralds a new savagery over questions of which lives matter in the twenty-first century, evoking what Isabelle Stengers presciently names “the coming barbarism” of escalating economic and, arguably, actual violence in the face of the climate crisis (23). The barbarity shared by the posthuman and the Anthropocene is their capacity to rupture human ontology only to reinstall a normatively human horizon for politics and culture. Their queer force becomes an instrument of normative insistence. Stacy Alaimo warns against the totalising effects of the Anthropocene and argues that we must maintain a sense of the world that is wholly nonhuman: “The anthropocentric arrogance of the very concept of the Anthropocene need be held in check by an elemental sense of the world as also, simultaneously, that which cannot be accessed, understood, and fundamentally altered by human practices” (307). Alaimo’s insistence on maintaining a sense of the nonhuman is arguably also a plea for the nonhuman’s queerness and its perplexing disruptions. Like imaginative fiction, critical theory must attend to how the more-than-human world continues to disrupt and shake regulatory knowledges and ontologies. This means untethering the human from how we imagine the future of the polity and planet, by which the parochialism of anthropic coordinates can only take us so far.

The pages that follow build upon the theoretical groundwork laid in this opening chapter. Through each chapter's explication of a single novel, I demonstrate the significance of posthuman representations for interrogating timely posthumanist questions. These novels queerly disrupt but also reinscribe normative versions of the human and in doing so, illustrate the broader cultural difficulties in imagining the human otherwise.

CHAPTER TWO

Condemnation and the Less-Than-Human: Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*

“There were all kinds of horrible stories about the woods,” recalls Kathy H, the narrator of Kazuo Ishiguro’s disconcerting novel *Never Let Me Go* (2005): “Once, not so long before we all got to Hailsham, a boy had had a big row with his friends and run off beyond the Hailsham boundaries. His body had been found two days later, up in those woods, tied to a tree with the hands and feet chopped off” (50). Kathy’s recollections of growing up within the confines of “Hailsham House” (49), a kind of boarding school in the English countryside, describe a “halcyon childhood” (Sim, *Kazuo* 82) haunted by a threatening outside world. The woods loom over the school like a “shadow” (Ishiguro 49), as the story of the dismembered boy foreshadows the violent future of Hailsham’s students. In telling such a horrific fiction about the violence done to a vulnerable child, the students unknowingly imitate the novel itself, which tells the story of their own truncated lives and inescapable deaths. As is gradually revealed to the reader, Kathy and her fellow students are clones. They exist to be harvested of their organs, in service to a biopolitical “donations programme” (256), which ensures the health of non-cloned humans. The clones are, effectively, condemned to death.

Through the story of the boy’s death in the woods, the novel intimates its fascination with shocking violence done to vulnerable people. Ishiguro’s text is emblematic of Jago Morrison’s characterisation of twenty-first-century fiction as a “turn to precarity” (“Turn” 19). The vulnerability of the novel’s clones is epitomised by the pivotal scene where an 11-year-old Kathy is found dancing to the novel’s titular song “Never Let Me Go” by the stern Madame. She is a visitor from the world

outside Hailsham who visits the school to collect student artwork for her “Gallery” (30). Kathy misreads, and fixates upon, the love song’s refrain, “Baby, baby, never let me go” (70). She imagines holding a baby that she will never have and uses a pillow to stand in for the child; as a clone, she cannot have children. She spies Madame, usually austere, crying and is perplexed by this emotional display. Towards the end of the novel, Madame tells a grown-up Kathy what she was thinking as she watched her dancing at Hailsham: “I saw a new world coming rapidly. ... And I saw a little girl, her eyes tightly closed, holding to her breast the old kind world ... and pleading, never to let her go” (267). The horror of abandoning precarious lives haunts Ishiguro’s novel.

The eponymous lyric functions as a plea: an intimate imperative to never desert the vulnerable other. However, as a plea it is useless and always already impotent; the world has already abandoned Kathy and those like her, has already cast them out of the body politic and subjected them to ruthless biopolitical regulation. The plea is issued nonetheless, for Kathy and her friends but also for the novel’s reader. Kathy’s lulling and antipoetic narrative returns to a peculiar refrain: “I don’t know how it was where you were” (13; 67; 94). Variations of this refrain draw the reader into the narrative world, asking them to recognise themselves in Kathy’s address as that “you” and to “remember” their own experience as a less-than-human clone. The reader is made vulnerable to Kathy’s “peculiarly intimate mode of address” (Boxall 99) as the novel extends its posthumanising reach. The novel’s literary effect proceeds from the tension between Kathy’s address and the reader’s human position, illustrating Grosz’s assertion that “[w]hatever nonhuman turn we may make, we must make it as (versions of) the human” (“Interview” 23). This novel acts and turns upon its reader. It asks how we are to read, and how we might be read

by, a posthuman figure. In doing so, the novel calls into question, if only for a moment, the reader's own humanity.

This chapter reads *Never Let Me Go* as a fiction of posthuman performativity. The novel constructs its posthuman organ donors as condemned creatures who live and die by language's active and world-making force. *Never Let Me Go* is the story of Kathy, Tommy and Ruth, human clones and childhood friends. The story is set in a "counterfactual twentieth-century England" with a "veneer of science fiction" (Black 785): since just after World War Two, human clones have been reared to supply healthy organs to the healthcare system (Ishiguro 257). The novel is focalised through the remarkably plain first-person narration of Kathy and presented as a recollection of her oscillating relationships with Ruth and Tommy. Kathy has been described as an "inadequate narrator" (Mullan 111) of unrelenting "blandness" (Boxall 98), whose "aleatory style" of "vague diction" (Walkowitz 224) is "excruciatingly ordinary in transit" and "smothered in the loam of the banal" (Wood *Fun* 28; "Human"). To the contrary, the banality of Kathy's narration is precisely what makes her an extraordinary narrator and crucial to the novel's depiction of the posthuman.

The novel is divided into three parts. With Part One, Kathy recounts her childhood at the privileged school of Hailsham, where adult "guardians" (6) deliver a curriculum to "students" focused on literature and making art (14). Hailsham is overseen by head guardian Miss Emily and periodically visited by Madame, who collects student art for her gallery. Another guardian, Miss Lucy, breaks ranks and reveals to the students (and the novel's reader) that they are clones. This reveal clarifies the "bureaucratized ordinariness of the [novel's] terms" (Whitehead 76): "students" grow up to be "carers" (4) and later "donors" (3). "Carers" provide social and emotional care for students who have begun "donating" their vital organs.

Part Two details Kathy's time at the idyllic country Cottages, as the students wait until they can begin their work as carers and donors. The Cottages' "easy-going" and "languid" atmosphere (117) belies the increasingly adult texture to the relationships between Kathy and her two childhood friends (who have been a couple since Hailsham), as they take further interest in their sexuality and origin. In Part Three, Kathy works as a carer, and Ruth and Tommy have begun their donations. After caring for Ruth up until her death, Kathy becomes Tommy's carer and lover. They apply to Madame and Miss Emily for a deferral from donation because they are in love, but discover that deferrals are just a rumour. Tommy dies and Kathy knows she must begin her own donations soon—knowledge that she has disclosed from the novel's first page.

Never Let Me Go represents the less-than-human student as governed by a central speech act of condemnation, "I condemn you." This speech act is unspeakable between the novel's covers, with the narrative propelled by the performative force of its implied utterance. Through the operations of "I condemn you," language confers and withholds the human significance of lives, enabling "ordinary human being[s]" (256) to regard students as "less than human" (258). Language is a biopolitical mechanism, which regulates the student population and legitimates the killing of students so that "ordinary" humans may live. Scholarship on the novel has persistently read *Never Let Me Go* in the context of anxious millennial debates surrounding the ethics of cloning (Arias; Black; Griffin, "Science"; Jerng; Marks). This interpretative frame risks shoehorning the novel into scientific analogy and overlooking the broader implications of Ishiguro's project, as Wai-Chew Sim writes: "Science is arguably pushed to the background in this novel so that it can explore what human-ness means" (*Kazuo* 83; see also Atwood, *Other* 169). For instance,

critics have unpacked the novel's human semantics in terms of art (Black; Marks; Matthews and Groes; Summers-Bremner; Whitehead), the empathy of caring (De Boever; Eatough; Robbins, "Cruelty" and *Upward*; Whitehead) and class (Black; Fluet, "Immaterial").

As well as its popular reception from literary critics, *Never Let Me Go* has garnered reviews in significant scientific publications. Ishiguro's status as a significant contemporary novelist is cemented not only in literary circles (see for example Bewes 206; Boxall 98; Fluet, "Antisocial" 207) but reflected by the scientific community as well. Reviewing the novel for the esteemed science journal *Nature*, Justine Burley hails *Never Let Me Go* as "the finest expression of moral disquietude over advances in biomedical science since Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* more than 70 years ago" (427). Reviews of the novel have featured in numerous other science publications (Arnsdorf; Butcher; Mirsky; Ross; Shah), implicitly attributing Ishiguro's critique of the human with a wider and interdisciplinary audience. In one such scientific publication, Morton F. Arnsdorf writes that novels like Ishiguro's communicate scientific ideas in a manner and to an audience that the discipline of science cannot: "From time to time, a work of fiction considers problems that arise from science in ways more compelling and with greater popular distribution than standard scientific publications" (628). In this respect, Ishiguro's novel is emblematic of the cultural positioning of posthuman fictions. Such thought experiments in human representation increasingly intersect literary and scientific domains. As the recent spike of literary interest in the Anthropocene illustrates, fictional critiques of the human often engage a range of scientific knowledges, such as geology, ecology and climatology, as I discuss elsewhere in this thesis.

Critics have been drawn to the novel's latent science fiction affiliations, with Mark Jerng writing that genre shapes expectations of "the proper form of [human] life" (371). Various analyses have drawn comparisons between *Never Let Me Go* and genre fictions about human experimentation both old and new, including Michael Bay's Hollywood blockbuster *The Island* (Jerng; Sim, *Kazuo*), Huxley's dystopian *Brave New World* (Sim, *Globalization* and *Kazuo*; Toker and Chertoff; Wasson; see also Atwood, "Brave" and *Other*; Burley; Menand; Mirsky; Scurr; Wood, "Human") and Mary Shelley's classic monster novel *Frankenstein* (Sim, *Globalization* and *Kazuo*; De Boever; Griffin, "Science"; McDonald; Tsao).

Wherever they appear, discussions of the novel repeatedly register shock at the students' compliance with their condemnation. Sim declares "the most shocking thing about [the novel] is the protagonists accept so matter of factly the horrific fate ordained for them" (*Kazuo* 79; see also De Boever 66; Elliott 97; Jerng 382; Robbins, *Upward* 203; Toker and Chertoff 166), and Shaneem Black asks, "Why is it that the characters in the novel fail to stage a rebellion, protest their fate, or move to France?" (793). Responses to the novel such as these are clouded by the inherently anthropocentric assumption that the properly human possesses a self-defining agency. *Never Let Me Go* makes the pivotal posthumanist move of stripping students of agency in advance by condemning them to death, thus worrying normative expectations of the human.

However, scholarship on *Never Let Me Go* has so far overlooked how condemnation structures the novel. Condemnation is exercised through the novel's strange biopolitical language, which regulates the entire existence of students. The scholarship is rife with descriptions of Ishiguro's "repetitive and inauthentic" use of language (Fluet, "Antisocial" 208; see also Walkowitz 224) exemplified by "the

novel's extensive lexicon of euphemisms" (Currie 103; see also Pandey), the "wild chill" of the text's pacifying vocabulary (Robbins, "Cruel" 291) and "Hailsham's highly scripted mode of existence" (De Boever 65). By reading the novel's depiction of the posthuman life of student organ donors, I argue that *Never Let Me Go* is propelled by a central speech act of condemnation and the conventions of human life it imposes. "I condemn you" dictates how students may love, have sex and ultimately be made killable. Through the text's reliance upon its antipoetic and performative vocabulary, *Never Let Me Go* reveals how the biopolitical policing of the human/nonhuman binary is an intensely textual practice. This novel is about how the value of humanness is distributed through language, and the potentially lethal consequences of such a distribution.

"I Condemn You": A Less-Than-Human Speech Act

"Your lives are set out for you," Hailsham guardian Miss Lucy tells a class of young students: "You were brought into this world for a purpose, and your futures, all of them, have been decided" (80). Miss Lucy describes the teleological arc of student lives: before they are old, they will undergo a series of medical procedures to donate their vital organs to fully human recipients. This is a revelation for the reader but not for the students. They have been "told and not told" about their fate since childhood (79), as Kathy notes: "It *was* like we'd heard everything somewhere before" (81 emphasis in original). The fact that they are "genetically manufactured beings," writes Boxall, is "always revealed in the text but also strangely hidden" (98). *Never Let Me Go*'s initial impression of the quintessentially British jolly-hockey-sticks boarding school novel (Carroll, "Imitations" 62; Currie 102) conceals a story of factory-farmed spare body parts. Hailsham's provision of "decent lives" for its students—grounded in

an education of books, sport and art—is horribly compromised from the start (Ishiguro 80). These students are less-than-human and condemned to the “purpose” they were “created” for (80). Their value lies in their innards rather than the life of the mind opened up by their liberal education.

Posthumanism and performativity have rarely been considered in concert. This is a curious omission in the scholarship as both theoretical frameworks are well placed to consider how errant subject positions, such as posthuman subjectivities, are constructed by textual practices and shaped by dominant cultural norms. Karen Barad outlines “a posthumanist materialist account of performativity” (827). The posthumanist dimension of her performative project is to allow “matter its due as an active participant in the world’s becoming” (803). However, recent new materialist scholarship shows more performative promise than Barad’s work, including Jane Bennett’s exposure of “the vitality of matter” (53) and Cohen’s reading of stone as lively and “storied matter” (*Stone* 20). Bringing posthumanism and performativity together should not have to mean dismissing language, as Barad argues. To do so is also, in a strong sense, to dismiss the human and thereby neuter the possibility of a critical posthumanist critique, as I outline in Chapter One. Language presses upon the human, shaping it and carving out its privilege. Structures of language are riddled with anthropocentrism. Considering the performative operations of language—how language acts and changes the world—reveals language as an ontologising and biopolitical tool by which the human is distinguished and other modalities of being are denied. Performativity is yet another avenue for a posthumanist critique of literature.

In *Never Let Me Go*, the students’ less-than-human status is policed by the novel’s characteristic antipoetic language. Seemingly hollow, the novel’s oblique and

peculiar vocabulary maps the lifespan of students. The word “clone” is used only twice (164; 256) with Hailsham preferring to think of its charges as “students” (256). Following their childhood at Hailsham or other facilities like it, students work as “carers” for others of their kind who have begun donating their organs, called “donors” (3). Each carer eventually becomes a donor, who may survive up to four donations before “completing”—the novel’s term for a clone’s death (5). This arc of caring, donating and completing is so entrenched within the novel that it defines the students before they are even aware that it exists. “Carers aren’t machines,” states Kathy (4), but nor are they “fully human” (256). A “hermeneutical uncertainty” surrounds the students’ claim to human value (Whitehead 61). The novel asks, if students aren’t clearly human or nonhuman then what are they? The novel pursues this question of posthuman ontology through its peculiar vocabulary: “caring,” “donating” and “completing” regulate the existence of these “students.”

The less-than-human is intrinsic to *Never Let Me Go*’s construction of the human. The human body is medicalised, defined by its susceptibility to chronic illnesses such as “cancer, motor neurone disease, heart disease” (258). The novel signals contemporary ontological anxieties surrounding diseased and disabled bodies, which challenge humanist notions of human bodily integrity and agency, as I write in Chapter One and Chapter Three. In its pursuit of the healthy and able body—a recognised norm of the human—the novel’s donation programme relies upon manufactured organs. This dependence upon less-than-human body parts shapes how the novel imagines the human. By problematising human ontology, the donations programme sees the human emerge from an inhumane narrative—from a story of institutionalised exploitation of less-than-human life. In this, the novel reiterates

familiar conceptualisations of the human subject defined by its excluded other, as

Butler writes:

[T]o be called unreal and to have that call, as it were, institutionalized as a form of differential treatment, is to become the other against whom (or against which) the human is made. It is the inhuman, the beyond the human, the less than human, the border that secures the human in its ostensible reality. ... To find that you are fundamentally unintelligible (indeed, that the laws of culture and of language find you to be an impossibility) is to find that you have not yet achieved access to the human, to find yourself speaking only and always *as if you were* human, but with the sense that you are not, to find that your language is hollow, that no recognition is forthcoming because the norms by which recognition takes place are not in your favor. (*Undoing* 30 emphasis in original)

For Butler, human subjectivity is constituted in relation to the Hegelian concept of the negative, which describes the construction of personhood through its relation with the other. Butler writes that “the subject I am is bound to the subject I am not” (*Frames* 43) in a state of more or less “harmonious interdependence” (*Subjects* 50). This relation between the subject and the other is constitutive but also fraught. The human subject is produced by its “relationship to that which is *not* itself, that which is different, strange, novel, awaited, absent, lost” but also compromised because subjectivity is revealed to exceed the bounds of the discrete self (Butler 9 emphasis in original). Effectively, the other is an intrinsic part of the subject as its constitutive other. *Never Let Me Go* binds the human to its less-than-human other. Ironically, dismantling such a violent arrangement would be inhumane. As Miss Emily asks, “How can you ask a world that has come to regard cancer as curable, how can you ask

such a world to put away that cure, to go back to the dark days?" (257). By exploiting less-than-human bodies, the human emerges from *Never Let Me Go* as thoroughly decentred. The human's "ontological hygiene" is contaminated (Graham 13).

Ishiguro's novel manufactures less-than-human life by way of its strange performative vocabulary. The rigid architecture of "caring," "donating" and "completing" constructs the less-than-human other and polices its condemned status. An analysis of the novel's performative language demonstrates the posthumanist work undertaken by this novel. The critical paradigms of performativity and posthumanism are well positioned to examine how texts not only describe but construct the world. However, posthumanist scholarship has only recently begun to adequately recognise what literary studies has long known: the critical work performed by literature. For instance, Jonathan Culler observes that "theorists have long asserted that we must attend to what literary language *does* as much as to what it *says*" (97 emphasis in original). Literature mediates ideas of the human and is a privileged site to examine how human subject positionality is "socially articulated and changeable" (Butler, *Undoing* 2). Reading literature exposes what Butler describes as the "shifting prerogative" of "humanness" (*Frames* 76) by which some forms of human life are privileged and authenticated while others are not recognised as human at all. As an essential aspect of literature's "doing," performative language is one significant way that texts construct, distribute and regulate human meaning.

My fascination with the performative aspects of "I condemn you" arises, in part, from the impossibility of its utterance in *Never Let Me Go*. The operations of condemnation are implicit to the narrative, which "thematizes acquiescence" and "docile assent" in its story of manufactured human life (Query 157). And yet, the novel refuses any utterance of those condemnatory words. The condemnation of

students is rationalised as a necessary but unspeakable evil, whereby less-than-human students must die to keep human bodies healthy. Condemnation, in Butler's words, "turns the moralist into a murderer" (*Giving* 49). Hailsham's head guardian, Miss Emily, comes the closest to articulating the condemnation of students, stating: "Here was the world, requiring students to donate" (258). The verb "to require" evasively stands in for condemnation, just as "the world" stands in for the human population that allows the donations programme to continue. Condemnation permeates this seemingly banal verb; "requiring," in this instance, reflects the intense condemnatory reality for the less-than-human students. Even Miss Emily cannot fully describe the condemnation of students, though she is part of the "little movement" of "Hailsham, Glenmorgan, the Saunders Trust" who campaign for the humane treatment of clones (258). The narrative conceals its governing speech act; the students are both "told and not told" of their condemnation (79).

The idea of a performative speech act emerged from the work of J. L. Austin. In *How To Do Things With Words*, Austin defines performative speech in this way: "to utter the sentence (in, of course, the appropriate circumstances) is not to *describe* my doing of what I should be said in so uttering to be doing or to state that I am doing it: it is to do it" (6 emphasis in original). Austin's theory formalises the familiar tenet of literary studies that language not only reflects but makes the world. As Sandy Petrey writes, Austin distinguishes the activity of performative speech from illustrative or "constative" language: "Constative utterances describe the world, performative utterances become part of the world" (Petrey 4). Important examples of performative utterances in Austin's work include "I bet you," "I dare you" and "I do." This last example from the marriage ceremony has received significant attention in the uptake of Austin's work. The ceremony hinges upon the couple's mutual utterance

of “I do.” With this utterance the couple are not describing marriage; they are, in Austin’s words, “indulging in it” (6). The happy couple’s speech, paired with the celebrant or priest’s utterance “I pronounce you,” constitute an integral part of the “doing” of marriage. By uttering these speech acts—by “performing” them—the couple’s marriage becomes real.

Austin later revises the constative/performative divide, concluding the two to be “indistinct” (Loxley 16). Instead, Austin develops a general theory of speech acts by which all utterances can be performative. The general theory means that more attention must be paid to “the circumstances of ‘issuing an utterance’” (92). This revised focus is especially relevant to my analysis of “I condemn you” with its governing yet unspeakable presence in *Never Let Me Go*. With broader theoretical scope, the general theory explains how each speech act employs three processes: “locution,” “illocution” and “perlocution.” Locution describes “an act *of* saying something” (Austin 100 emphasis in original). For instance, I say the words “I condemn you” and convey a certain meaning. Illocution describes “an act *in* saying something” (Austin 99 emphasis in original) where the words are imbued with a certain “force” (Austin 109). Illocutionary force is similar to Austin’s initial definition of a performative utterance. “I condemn you,” for instance, may have the force of a moral reprimand, a punitive sentence in a court of law, or capital punishment. Perlocution describes an act “*by* saying something” (Austin 109 emphasis in original). In the short-term, “I condemn you” might dismay or anger the condemned. In the long-term and in more extreme cases, it might legitimate removing a person’s freedom, stripping them of their human rights, or putting them to death. Perlocution describes the uptake and aftermath of a speech act. Perlocution names the reverberations of an utterance, the effects of which are radically unpredictable. By

perlocution, “I condemn you” can act far beyond the circumstances of its original utterance.

Despite Austin’s revision of the notion of a performative speech act, his approach remains somewhat blinkered. Andrew Parker and Sedgwick point out that Austin’s theory performs “two radical condensations: of the complex producing and underwriting relations of the ‘hither’ side of the utterance, and of the no-less-constitutive negotiations that comprise its uptake” (6-7). Derrida and Butler prise apart this “‘hither’ side” of a performative utterance, which comprises the locutionary act of speaking words with illocutionary force. Derrida highlights “a general citationality” or “a general iterability” of a speech act’s utterance, “without which there would not even be a ‘successful’ performative” (*Limited* 17). Butler stresses that a performative speech act works “only because that action echoes prior actions” (*Excitable* 51). The utterance of a speech act “quotes” from that speech act’s “historicity” of past utterances (Butler, *Excitable* 51). By saying the words “I condemn you,” I recite condemnation’s traditionally judgemental and punitive past so that I may condemn another in the present. Each performative voids its originality by claiming its strange power from the history of its previous utterances. In a sense, any performative—“I condemn you,” “I do”—has always already been spoken.

Alongside their historicity, performative speech acts also work spatially. Parker and Sedgwick insist that doing “justice” to a performative “requires a disimpaction of the scene, as well as the act, of utterance” (8). Sedgwick utilises a “metaphorics of space” to describe the reverberating activity of performative utterances (*Touching* 68). This “spatializing impulse” elaborates the notion of perlocution, whereby performative effects extend beyond a speech act’s explicit utterance. Sedgwick introduces “a new class of *periperformative* utterances whose

complex efficacy depends on their tangency to, as well as their difference from, the explicit performatives” (5 emphasis in original). She writes:

Peripperformative utterances aren’t just about performative utterances in a referential sense: they cluster around them, they are near them or next to them or crowding against them; they are in the neighborhood of the performative. Like neighborhoods in real estate ads, peripperformative neighborhoods have prestigious centers (the explicit performative utterance) but no very fixed circumferences; yet the prestige of the center extends unevenly, even unpredictably through the rest of the neighborhood. (68)

Never Let Me Go employs “I condemn you” in an intensely peripperformative manner. Adopting Sedgwick’s parlance, the “prestigious centre” of Ishiguro’s novel is the explicit performative utterance of condemnation which takes the form of Austin’s “first person singular present indicative active form” (150): “I condemn you.” Significantly, *such an utterance is never spoken within the novel*. Condemnation lances outward from its unspeakable speech act. “I condemn you” works elliptically. The speech act does not kill students directly, but rather anticipates a whole series of utterances crucial to the narrative’s representation of killing posthuman life, some of which are directed at humans and some directed at clones: “I care for you,” “I donate for you,” “I complete for you.”

Condemnation floods the novel and subtends its banal language. When students describe their work as carers and donors, they implicitly declare their condemnation. Their complicity in their condemnation is startling. Kathy and her employers are “pleased” with her caring “work” (3). Ruth describes herself as “a pretty decent carer” but is “pretty much ready” to begin donating when her notice arrives; “[i]t felt right,” she says, “After all, it’s what we’re *supposed* to be doing”

(223 emphasis in original). Tommy is “a lousy carer” but says, “I’m a pretty good donor” (223). These kinds of statements are ubiquitous in the narrative: they are “the sort of thing you hear donors say to each other all the time” (223). The quotidian detail of such statements are periperformative, their ethic of generosity and obligation horribly sublimated. The ordinary verbs they employ—caring, donating, completing—cluster around the novel’s condemnatory heart, the absent utterance of “I condemn you.” Mark Romanek’s film adaptation of the novel sacrifices the subtlety of condemnation in the novel. The film shows students as electronically tagged, like domesticated pets with responsible owners, making explicit the regulatory control of the less-than-human.

Condemnation has an ontologising function. Butler describes condemnation as a quick way “to posit an ontological difference between judge and judged, even to purge oneself of another” (*Giving* 46). “I condemn you,” in Butler’s words, “takes aim at the life of the condemned, destroying his ethical capacity” (49) whilst also “moraliz[ing] a self by disavowing commonality with the judged” (46). *Never Let Me Go* uses condemnation as a means of shoring up the normativity of the human subject and the fundamental abnormality of its others. As Butler puts it, “[c]ondemnation becomes the way we establish the other as nonrecognizable or jettison some aspect of ourselves that we lodge in the other, whom we then condemn” (46). Students must be killed, and not just for their life-saving organs. Killing them serves a symbolic function. It signifies the human attempting to destroy the knowledge that the human and its others are always already ontologically tangled together.

Like many performative speech acts, “I condemn you” rehearses a norm. *Never Let Me Go* is organised by a condemnatory speech act thoroughly invested in the human. Chen diagnoses a similar anthropic investment in Austin’s notion of

performativity. In Austin's view, the success of a performative relies upon a number of supporting conditions such as "the proper positioning of that person delivering the performative" (Chen 94). Performatives fail when the speaker is "not a proper person" and does not have the "capacity" to perform the act in those circumstances (Austin 23). Austin writes, "where there is not even a pretence of capacity or a colourable claim to it, then there is no accepted conventional procedure; it is a mockery, like a marriage with a monkey" (24). Austin returns frequently to the marriage ceremony as the prototypical performative act, as various analyses have noted (Butler, *Bodies* 224; Chen 94; Felman 6; Fletcher 113; Parker and Sedgwick 10; Petrey 40; Sedgwick, "Queer" 3). Austin's example about marrying a monkey is more than a throwaway line. Chen argues that it reveals the "animality" of Austin's consummate performative act, subsequently indicating marriage's investment in the norm of the human (93).

Austin's monkey invites a queer reading. As Chen writes, if the example of marriage with a monkey is taken "seriously" then Austin's dismissal of the animal "consign[s] the marrying monkey to queer life" (96). The example "equates a particular kind of animal with the performative's excess" (Chen 95). As Chen points out, the monkey is a traditionally "raced animal figure" (93) that, in Austin's words, has no "colourable claim" to taking part in a performative act (23-24). Shoshana Felman reads the monkey as a "trivial" and "witty example" of Austin's "black humor" (84), but this analysis overlooks the animal's significance in the context of marriage's commitment to the human. Nonetheless, Felman describes Austin's joke as a "monstrous marriage" (84) with her hyperbolic turn of phrase citing marriage's normativity (and curiously anticipating the warnings of bestiality favoured by some contemporary opponents to non-heterosexual marriage). Chen argues, "in citing a particular kind of marriage just as he asserts its invalidity, however humorously,

Austin is responding to a sensed threat. Someone's heteronormative and righteous marriage must be protected against the mockeries of marriage" (96). These mockeries draw attention to marriage's historical protection of a certain kind of human: heterosexual and white. Chen recognises the queer implications of the monkey's exclusion: "it is not just marrying monkeys, but those who occupy proximal category membership, that is, those who *approximate* marrying monkeys, who are consigned to queer life" (96 emphasis in original). The monkey represents a range of disruptive subjects, whose proximity to the performative act of marriage perverts not only heteronormativity but, in Austin's words, "appropriate" (15) and "proper" (23) forms of personhood and their capacity to speak in recognisable ways.

Never Let Me Go offers its own horrifying example of performativity's animality. As with Austin's marrying monkey, this section of the novel describes a less-than-human disruption to "I condemn you" and its propulsion of the narrative. In a field empty of livestock, Tommy screams in rage at the condemnation of students—a sole figure of deranged but ultimately hopeless resistance. As the novel's only resistant utterance, the scene of Tommy's scream warrants attention. Near the novel's end, he and Kathy drive home through rural England by night. They have discovered that the rumour that students may gain a deferral from donations, if they are in love, is precisely that: Miss Emily describes deferrals as a "rumour" (252) for students "to dream about, a little fantasy" (253). Completion looms before them. Tommy will make his fourth donation shortly (meaning that he has already given three of his organs) and Kathy is his carer (she will begin her own donations soon). Reflecting on the "obscure back roads" on which they drive, it seems to Kathy as if these "dark byways of the country existed just for the likes of us, while the big glittering motorways with their huge signs and super cafes were for everyone else" (267).

Kathy believes they belong on the “weird roads” of the countryside (267), away from the “big glittering motorways” of the ordinary human population and placing their less-than-human selves in proximity to the nonhuman world of rural England. Their less-than-human bodies are, in a sense, the “dark byways”—the “weird” and abnormal landscape—through which humans carve their way to postpone death. Kathy’s impression of the byways as a secluded space reserved for people like her and Tommy is a fantasy and imagined privilege. She realises, “of course, that other people used these roads” (267). There is no privilege here, and the fantasy is a dark one.

Condemnation’s pervasiveness permits almost no resistance in the novel, with the exception of Tommy’s screaming fit in the field. Protesting their fate is hopeless and Tommy even questions the necessity of carers, bleakly stating: “The donors will all donate, just the same, and then they’ll complete” (276). Nonetheless Tommy’s scream expresses an animalised reply to “I condemn you.” On their way home, he exits Kathy’s car and climbs through “an impenetrable thicket” to a muddy, windy field (268). Kathy mistakenly thinks he is “sick again” (268), but it is not his diminishing, disabled body that drives him into the field. He yields to the less-than-human status thrust upon him, and acts out against the condemned fate of students with animalised abandon. He screams like “some maniac ... lurking in the bushes” (268), “raging, shouting, flinging his fists and kicking out” (269). He “stink[s] of cow poo” and his face is “caked in mud and distorted with fury” (269). Condemnation’s speech act is such an oppressive and shockingly intelligible utterance that Tommy’s furious reply is almost unintelligible, taking the inarticulate form of “jumbled swear-words” and uncontrollable screams (269). His mobilisation of language to refute

condemnation is, in Butler's terms, "hollow" of human significance (*Undoing* 30) and anticipates the surgical hollowing out of his body as his organs are cut out.

His fury is impotent and witnessed only by Kathy, another condemned student. Tommy is grateful that the field is empty: "Good job there weren't cows in the field. They'd have got a fright" (269). There are not even any nonhuman animals to hear Tommy's raging, let alone any humans who are complicit in his condemnation. Indeed Tommy and Kathy symbolically replace the cows, as the novel offers a chilling parallel between filleting students of their organs and farming nonhuman animals for meat. The animal haunts the novel's depiction of the biopolitical regulation of students, who are shown to be ontologically similar to food animals. The couple occupy a space previously reserved for livestock, whose faeces mix with the mud caking Tommy's face. The screaming episode ends quickly as Kathy holds Tommy tightly and feels "the fight go out of him" (269). His fury is transitory and ends with his screams, his less-than-linguistic raging. He is embarrassed by the noise he has made and apologises repeatedly: "I'm really sorry, Kath," "Oh God, Kath. How do I explain this?" (269), "I'm sorry about just now, Kath. I really am. I'm a real idiot" (270). His outburst reminds Kathy of his tantrums as a boy at Hailsham, where he'd go "bonkers" (270) and scream "a nonsensical jumble of swear words and insults" (9). Griffin writes that these outbursts mark Tommy as the novel's "only revolting angel" ("Science" 657) and De Boever reads his tantrums as "an exit point, the only moments within the Hailsham hell when a *critical* way out appears to be possible" (73 emphasis in original). The possibility of revolt is clearly severely limited, as the novel represents such moments of defiance as childish. In the field, his adult self can only express his resistance to condemnation—

encoded by the narrative as a shameful fit of noise, like a child's tantrum—at the edge of an obscure dark road, in a dark field, on the very fringes of language.

While refusing condemnation is impossible, *Never Let Me Go* begins to pervert the proper course of “I condemn you.” In a startling admission, the narrative suggests that the regulated milestones of student lifespans—caring, donating, completing—conceal the protracted horror of the organ donor. Tommy nears his fourth donation, which is understood within the novel as the last donation before completion. Donors worry about their fourth “because they’re not sure they’ll really complete” (273). Kathy dismisses this concern as “rubbish” and “wild talk” but she and Tommy recoil from this “whole territory” of distressing speculation:

You’ll have heard the same talk. How maybe, after the fourth donation, even if you’ve technically completed, you’re still conscious in some sort of way; how then you find there are more donations, plenty of them, on the other side of that line; how there are no more recovery centres, no carers, no friends; how there’s nothing to do except watch your remaining donations until they switch you off. It’s horror movie stuff, and most of the time people don’t want to think about it. (273)

The excesses of the speech act intensify the effects of condemnation but also disrupt the conventional structure established by “I condemn you.” Students might be forced to make countless donations without the help of carers, the mercy of completion delayed as they lie paralysed on the operating table. In this section, the novel begins its own speculative disimpaction of its governing utterance. *Never Let Me Go* queers itself, not by destabilising condemnation but by disturbing its proper course.

The judicial orderliness of condemnation is threatened by the drawn-out bodily extravagances of medical horror. The threat of this visceral and paralytic future

is like a genre fiction, emphasised by Kathy's mention of "wild talk" and "horror movie stuff." Kathy's words also gesture to the book's position as a literary novel that employs thematic concerns of science fiction; Kathy's mention of the horror genre operates as a self-reflexive comment on the novel's awareness of its genre commitments. The irony of this speculation on life after the fourth donation is that it may be true. The conventional lifespan of a student, drummed into them since Hailsham—caring, donating, completing—may be a "fiction" of the biopolitical system that defines them. Successful completion is caught between the governing fact of "I condemn you" and speculation upon its horrifying excesses.

Failures of Recognition: Posthumanism's Poor Creatures

"We hadn't been ready for that," says Kathy, surprised at the unintended consequences of a childish game at Hailsham (35). They are testing Ruth's theory that Madame is afraid of Hailsham students. She is, but the real shock for Kathy and her friends is that she fears students as if they are nonhuman creatures: "she was afraid of us in the same way someone might be afraid of spiders. ... It had never occurred to us to wonder how *we* would feel, being seen like that, being the spiders" (35 emphasis in original). The novel is punctuated by nonhuman characterisations of students, which unite the nonhuman's worrying otherness with an ethical obligation to care for precarious life. The students can only be recognised as "poor creatures" (249; 267), condemned to the ethical poverty of the other. This failure to accord human significance to their lives is nonetheless thoroughly necessary to the constitution of the normal human subject. The human emerges from such wanton failures of recognition.

As not fully human, the students' lives are also ungrievable. Kathy's narrative and the whole donations programme rests upon a lacuna of grief, an alarming absence of mourning for the students killed as "medical commodit[ies]" (Boxall 98). Boxall draws attention to this strange absence in the text: "the formal texture in the novel ... produces this strange fall from a quotidian experience of the normal and the proper into something that, even at the level of the sentence, is unspeakable, registered only in the repeated missing beat in the novel's tinny language" (98-99). Butler's recent work examines how properly human lives are marked by grief. "[G]rievability," writes Butler, "is a presupposition for the life that matters" (*Frames* 14). Butler suggests "tarrying with grief" as a way of examining how different lives matter differently, how "certain human lives are more grievable than others" (*Precarious* 30). Butler examines those less grievable and ungrievable lives that are worth less in American systems of meaning, including people living with disability, non-heterosexual and trans people, Guantanamo Bay inmates and the Afghan people killed in the US war in Afghanistan. Fiona Jenkins writes that the "political division" between grievable and ungrievable lives is "most readily understood as if it ethically posed an issue of recognition, as the mode whereby a body is invested with a protective significance" (162). The paradigm of recognition is a familiar feature of Butler's work, but with grief comes a challenge to recognition's distribution of a subject's significance. Ungrievable life is not recognised as fully human and, as Butler writes, "this specter ... gnaws at the norms of recognition" (*Frames* 12) which are, at their heart, thoroughly invested in anthropocentric hierarchies of power.

Never Let Me Go exaggerates such problems of recognition, to such an extent that ungrievable students are misrecognised as nonhuman or spider-like. Their bodies attract not grief but fear and revulsion. Just as Kathy's friends surround Madame, so

does Kathy's recollection swirl around the moment when Madame misrecognises the humanity of the students:

Only when she came to a stiff halt did we each murmur: "Excuse me, Miss"
 [I]t wasn't even as though Madame did anything other than what we
 predicted she'd do: she just froze and waited for us to pass by. She didn't
 shriek, or even let out a gasp As she came to a halt, I glanced quickly at
 her face And I can still see it now, the shudder she seemed to be
 suppressing (35)

Curiously, this scene begins to take itself apart. The narrative attempts to prise open its anthropocentric structures of recognition and disimpact its own performative governance. In her typically unimaginative style, Kathy's circling narration indexes her implicit awareness of being condemned through her surprise at being looked at and misrecognised as a spider.

Provoking "real dread" in another person proves a formative moment for Kathy (35). The interaction is repeated years later, when Kathy and Tommy apply to Madame for a deferral from their donations: "you could see [Madame] stiffen—as if a pair of large spiders was set to crawl towards her" (243). Inspiring fear and revulsion is common to students, as Kathy tells the reader, "I'm sure somewhere in your childhood, you too had an experience like ours that day":

[T]he moment when you realise that you really are different to them; that
 there are people out there, like Madame, who don't hate you or wish you
 harm, but who nevertheless shudder at the very thought of you—of how you
 were brought into this world and why—and who dread the idea of your hand
 brushing against theirs. The first time you glimpse yourself through the eyes
 of a person like that, it's a cold moment. It's like walking past a mirror you've

walked past every day of your life, and suddenly it shows you something else, something troubling and strange. (36)

The dreadful affect triggered in Madame by students represents the human's anxious awareness of its own ontological vulnerability. Kathy's description of a familiar childhood experience for clones exemplifies how processes of recognition break down for the reader. The reader's initial misrecognition of the students as human changes with the gradual discovery of their clone status. The students are shown to be "something else, something troubling and strange," which in turn shakes the reader's recognition of their own human identity via the novel's interpellative address. As posthuman figures, the students represent how the human/nonhuman binary is fundamentally ruptured. Surgically, the dreadful organs of students pervade the shuddering bodies of sick humans. Miss Emily expresses disgust at this posthumanist disruption: "Is [Madame] afraid of you? We're *all* afraid of you. I myself had to fight back my dread of you all almost every day I was at Hailsham. ... I'd feel such revulsion" (264 emphasis in original). The students are like an intensified example of Butler's notion of Hegelian negativity, which I described earlier in this chapter. The normative human subject exists in a constitutive and compromised relation with the otherness of the less-than-human student. The human body of *Never Let Me Go* is constituted by—and medically sutured to—the student body it condemns as unnatural and repulsive.

As organ donors, students are systematically denied human recognition to facilitate their condemnation. Depriving students of recognition (or misrecognising them as spider-like) makes killing them easier, because it denies the significance of their to-be-killed bodies. Their ungrievable bodies are dissected in advance: "people preferred to believe these organs appeared from nowhere, or at most that they grew in

a kind of vacuum” (257). Not only are they deprived human recognition but also the recognisable form of the human body. As Haraway writes, “only human beings can be murdered” (*Species* 78) and lumps of meat, sprouting in a laboratory vacuum, are barely regarded as alive let alone worthy of grief. Despite Hailsham’s humanising project, students are still regarded by most people as “[s]hadowy objects in test tubes” used “to supply medical science” (Ishiguro 256). Through their nonhuman characterisation, students are not only deprived of human significance but are barely recognised as subjects at all.

By their own admission, students recognise the negligible value of their objectified bodies. In an angry outburst, Ruth describes their reproductive origins in terms of rubbish: “We’re modelled from *trash*. Junkies, prostitutes, winos, tramps. Convicts, maybe, just so long as they aren’t psychos” (164 emphasis in original). As Eluned Summers-Bremner writes, students are modelled from “the ranks of disposable humans associated with the animal: the mad, the homeless, or those driven to sex work” (156). The novel remobilises “trash,” a pejorative term for society’s dehumanised outcasts, into an expression of the students’ objectified and disposable bodies. They are like trash: nonhuman, nonliving and abject. Ruth tells Kathy and Tommy, “you look in the gutter. You look in rubbish bins. Look down the toilet, that’s where you’ll find where we all came from” (164). Ruth reinforces the repulsion expressed by Madame and Miss Emily, likening their bodies and origins to excrement and the unsightly waste of human consumerism.

Never Let Me Go cements its metaphor of rubbish with the final scene. A couple of weeks after Tommy’s death, Kathy stands on the side of a road overlooking “acres of ploughed earth” lined with a fence of “two lines of barbed wire” (281). At the bottom of the fence, “all sorts of rubbish had caught and tangled. It was like the

debris you get on a seashore” (282), worthless stuff not just let go but thrown carelessly away without a second thought. In the trees by the fence, “torn plastic sheeting and bits of old carrier bags” flap about (282). Kathy thinks about “the rubbish, the flapping plastic in the branches, the shore-line of odd stuff caught along the fencing” and imagines that “this is the spot where everything I’d ever lost since my childhood had washed up” (282). The litter of student bodies is likened to the “beached boat” that fascinates them (211-12), with “cracking” paint and a timber frame “crumbling away” (220). Like the shipwrecked boat on the isolated beach, the “debris” of her friends seem to have “washed up” at this barbed wire fence in the middle of nowhere. The rubbish swirls at Kathy’s feet as she imagines that if she waits long enough, Tommy’s “tiny figure” will appear from across the field like another piece of worthless litter scattered upon the shore (282).

Improper Love: Sex, Death and the Less-Than-Human

“One thing that occurs to me now,” recalls Kathy, “is that when the guardians first started giving us proper lectures about sex, they tended to run them together with the talk about donations” (81). Kathy frames the pairing of sexual education and organ donation as “probably natural” (82). Condemnation naturalises this pairing by demanding healthy student bodies; biopolitically, condemnation exerts a regularising power over the lives of students in order to produce and procure healthy organs. Sexual health receives particular attention from the narrative as a further means of distinguishing less-than-human ontology. As Kathy remarks, it is “much more important” for students to avoid sexually transmitted diseases “than for normal people on the outside. And that, of course, would bring us onto donations” (82). Kathy’s off-hand phrase “of course” strengthens the natural association between sexual activity

and the obligation to donate organs. Kathy's conversational phrasing implies that this association is a commonly understood truth and implicates the reader in this understanding. This exemplifies a key strategy in this novel whereby the reader is interpellated by, or drawn into, Kathy's frame of reference. In this instance, she calls upon the reader to recognise this supposedly natural connection between sex and death. Kathy's quotidian yet insistent address bolsters the novel's hierarchies of power, whereby the human community sublimates the sexuality of students into another mechanism of biopolitical control. Healthy sex, the students believe, results in top-quality organs. In examining *Never Let Me Go*'s representation of sex and death, I argue that the meeting of the two is a key site of the novel's "theorising" of the less-than-human.

Sexual education is central to Hailsham's curriculum, but the students cannot decide if the guardians want them to have sex at school or not. The school is a biopolitical institution charged with regularising the collective body of its student population. Hailsham's administration of sexuality comprises a significant part of the donations programme's control of organ donors. At school, the students exchange differing theories about the importance of sexual intercourse, with each theory drawing attention to the vulnerability of student bodies. Indeed these theories return to an ingrained belief that having sex is essential to becoming a good organ donor. One student suggests they are sexually vulnerable to the Hailsham guardians (95), whereas another believes sex keeps their bodies in working order: "Hannah had the theory that it was [the guardians'] duty to make us have sex because otherwise we wouldn't be good donors later on. According to her, things like your kidneys and pancreas didn't work properly unless you kept having sex" (94). Sex has a prescriptive function in the novel; through sexual intercourse, students believe they cultivate "good" and

“properly” working bodies for the donations programme. Kathy is more convinced by Ruth’s theory, which describes the long-term health benefits of sexual education for after Hailsham: “They’re telling us about sex for after we leave Hailsham They want us to do it properly, with someone we like and without getting diseases. But they really mean it for after we leave” (95). Sex is a mechanism for regulating the health of the less-than-human. Healthy sex—Hailsham’s admonition to “do it properly”—comprises a mechanism of regulation for less-than-human bodies. Proper sexual practice is part of a donor’s professional obligation to donate and die properly.

Sexual education at Hailsham draws explicit attention to the formative role of death in student sexuality. Miss Emily teaches the students “the nuts and bolts” of sexual intercourse with a “life-size skeleton,” which she arranges in “various contortions” and “different variations” in front of the class (82). How to have sex is modelled by a familiar icon of death, which slumps in an “obscene heap on the desktop” (82). The skeleton’s bare bones offers the students a glimpse of their own deathly futures—they, too, will be stripped of their organs—in the context of their nascent sexualities.

Hailsham’s macabre prefiguration of death within sex reflects various analyses of queer theory, which examine the traditional alignment of queer sexual subjects with death in Western culture (Bersani; Bersani and Phillips; Edelman). These analyses reveal, in Jonathan Dollimore’s words, that “death inhabits sexuality: perversely, lethally, ecstatically” (xi). The deathliness of sex has proven both hostile, in the context of the AIDS crisis (Bersani; Butler, *Frames*; Dollimore), and politically productive, with critics re-appropriating queerness’s entrenched association with death and disease (Bersani; Edelman). Death “has not been repressed,” claims Dollimore, “so much as resignified in new, complex and productive ways which then

legitimate a never-ending analysis of it” (126). Ishiguro’s novel uses death to resignify student intimacy as queer, thus rendering their ethical standing contestable. As Gabriele Griffin writes, students “are in a sense ‘the living dead’ and as such need to be regarded as other, as non-human, if a fantasy of the human as that which lives is to be sustained” (“Science” 654). The queerness of Hailsham—of its charges and its sexual curriculum—indicates that discourses of normative sexuality intersect with discourses of normative human life.

Like many fictional representations of the posthuman, the students are constructed by the text as queer. By stressing the conventional form of less-than-human sexuality as heterosexual, the novel reveals how sexual norms are caught up in notions of the properly human. Hailsham is a heteronormative institution, in the market of producing heterosexually active less-than-human students who will, in the near future, yield their organs. At Hailsham, students police the sexual activity of their peers by castigating any engagement in non-heterosexual relations. “I don’t know how it was where you were,” says Kathy, “but at Hailsham we definitely weren’t at all kind towards any signs of gay stuff” (94). Students are invested in the notion of “proper sex” as heterosexual (95) at the exclusion of “gay sex” or “umbrella sex” as they describe it (94). Their privileging of certain sexual practices over others reflects the historical tethering of heterosexuality to the properly human (Butler, *Precarious* 32-33; *Undoing* 29-30). The students seem to implicitly recognise, in Rachel Carroll’s words, “the implication of presumptive heterosexuality in definitions of the human—and in the discourses of rights to which humans have a claim” (“Imitations” 63). Non-heterosexual practices are implicitly dehumanised, as same-sex attracted students are sexually objectified in nonhuman terms: “if you fancied someone your own sex, you were ‘an umbrella’” (94). By this linguistic

objectification, non-heterosexual students are denied sexual autonomy and pleasure. They become inert and nonliving, prematurely condemned by their peers to the same fate that awaits all students.

By objectifying all students as organs for human transplant, the novel compromises any notion of a normal human body. The work of the donations programme is to transplant less-than-human organs into normal human bodies. Donation has a posthumanist logic, by which the human is always already tied up with the less-than-human in a fundamentally material sense. As cloned organs are stitched into human bodies, these surgical procedures queer human materiality. At Hailsham, suggestions of bodies splitting open foreshadow organ transplantation. “We should never take chances with our health,” says Tommy, worried that his body will “all unzip like a bag opening up” from a gash on his elbow (84). As Sara Wasson writes, the “raw horror of the surgical wound is at the centre of the book” (81). The other Hailsham students are fascinated by Tommy’s gash, as he peels away the dressing “to reveal something at just that stage between sealing and still being an open wound. You could see bits of skin starting to bond, and soft red bits peeping up from underneath” (83). They joke about “unzipping” their skin as a way of speaking about donating: “you’d just be able to unzip a bit of yourself, a kidney or something would slide out, and you’d hand it over” (86). The students intuit how precarious their bodies are. This selfless naivety—handing organs over like a gift—is horribly undercut by the paralysing horror of a donor’s complete extraction (274) which the novel only hints at.

Organ transplant is also suggested by notions of consumption and eating. As Kathy describes the unzipping joke, “It wasn’t something we found so funny in itself; it was more a way of putting each other off our food. You unzipped your liver, say,

and dumped it on someone's plate, that sort of thing" (86). They imagine their objectification as a meal, grossly served up on crockery. As Robbins writes, the students are like "a collectivity of sheep that do not seem to have realized ... their lives consist mainly of standing around waiting to be eaten" (*Upward* 202). Student bodies are expendable sustenance to be consumed by sick human bodies. This cannibalistic metaphor describes not only how human bodies are maintained but also how they are compromised. As Wasson writes, "the monstrous body" glimpsed through the novel "is the body of the organ *recipient*, a body monstrous in its artificially enhanced ability to assimilate the tissue of others" (73 emphasis in original). The novel offers a "stark warning" against "a diluted species being" for the human (Boxall 101) as monstrous human "originals devour their doubles" (Wasson 73). The human is queered by its surgical appetite and rendered posthuman. They are both human and less-than-human in terms of their ideological positions and bodies; they come to embody that which they have previously condemned as less-than-human, as not being allowed to live.

Students have no reproductive future. They are manufactured with an "emblematic sterility" (Fluet, "Antisocial" 211), which is a distinguishing ontological difference between "normal" humans (94) and less-than-human students in the novel. Kathy explains, "the reason [sex] meant so much ... was because the people out there were different from us students: they could have babies from sex. That was why it was so important to them" (82; see also 94-95). Although "nominally heterosexual," as Carroll puts it, they are "nevertheless at odds with heterosexual norms" ("Imitations" 60). Their heterosexual appropriation of proper sex fails to meet "the heterosexual prerogative to reproduction" (Carroll 63). In a sense, they are queerly heterosexual.

The novel implies that heterosexual intercourse claims its privilege from reproductive potential. Heterosexuality has a direct reproductive future. As I write in Chapter One and throughout in this thesis, Edelman critiques the notion of “reproductive futurism” (21), which describes how human communal relations are organised by “the cult of the Child and the political order it enforces” (30). Politics always looks forward to the protection of this infant like “an erotically charged investment in the rigid sameness of identity” (Edelman 21). In this way, heteronormativity reproduces its own “compulsory narrative” of the future via reproduction (21). Despite subscribing to heteronormative hierarchies, *Never Let Me Go*’s students violate reproductive futurism’s narrative. “We had to respect the rules,” says Kathy, “and treat sex as something pretty special” because of its reproductive potential (82). Students break the rules of reproductive futurism and undermine the sexual norm—virile heterosexuality—upon which it stakes its claim. Their bodies can only promise a deathly future of organ production rather than the reproduction of children.

The cost of such queer rule breaking is high. If, as Edelman writes, “the future is nothing but kid stuff” it is also a normatively human domain (30) as I argue in my analysis of the Anthropocene in later chapters of this thesis. In *Never Let Me Go*, the students’ only future is in service to the human norm through their organs, which outlive them in other people’s bodies (Griffin, “Science” 652; Whitehead 65) because their viscera are, in fact, “someone else’s organs” (Robbins, *Upward* 202). Student bodies represent a form of queer excess, undermining the proper reproductive future symbolised by the child. Students admonish excessive sexual desire, codified by the narrative as “strange” and “weird” (126). Kathy confesses to Ruth that sometimes she feels like “doing it” so much that she would have sex with “almost anybody,” and

worries that her libido means “[t]here might be something not quite right with me, down there” (126). Kathy’s concern about being sexually excessive and “not quite right” is reflected in the “Morningdale scandal” (258) which ends Hailsham’s humane project. A scientist employs cloning technology to produce not organ donors but superhuman children with “enhanced characteristics” (258) that would be raised as proper children. The prospect of “a generation of created children” alarms the general population: “Children demonstrably *superior* to the rest of us? Oh no. That frightened people” (259 emphasis in original). The future is reserved for a certain kind of child—a child that does not exceed heterosexual reproduction or deliver a future to queerness and posthumanity.

As I have argued so far, the queerness of the less-than-human is not confined to students alone, but instead disrupts the conventions of reproductive heterosexuality as a human norm. Proper sexual practice anticipates a properly human future, built upon the mass killing of less-than-human lives. Of the novel’s insistent disruption to the anthropic status quo, Carroll goes so far as arguing “that it is not the human status of the clone which is in question in this novel so much as the normative discourses which conspire to contest it” (“Imitations” 60). In particular, the novel calls into question heteronormative hierarchies and the function of art, and the supposed proof they offer of a subject’s humanity. The novel places the anthropocentrism of heterosexual love and creativity under immense duress.

Never Let Me Go enlists artistic production to prove what a student’s sterile body cannot. Art, not their future capacity to bear children, offers students the opportunity to reveal their humanity. At Hailsham, students intuit the compulsory nature of both sex and creativity: “sex had got like ‘being creative’” (95) in that “[i]t felt like if you hadn’t done it yet, you ought to, and quickly” (96). By this logic,

students believe in the human value of heterosexual intercourse and art. They subscribe to heteronormativity's anthropocentrism and, as Whitehead puts it, "the Romantic myth that [art] is an expression of their 'souls' or innermost selves'" (66). Hailsham cultivates in its students a humanist faith in creativity, where "things like pictures, poetry, all that kind of stuff ... *revealed what you were like inside*. ... [T]hey *revealed your soul*" (173 emphasis in original). But as Miss Emily explains, Hailsham uses art not just to reveal the kinds of people students are, but to show that students are people to begin with: "we did it to *prove you had souls at all*" (255 emphasis in original). The creative curriculum is intended as evidence of the students' baseline claim to the moral status of the human. "Look at this art!" cries Miss Emily, "How dare you claim these children are anything less than fully human?" (256). As Whitehead argues, Ishiguro "appears to offer a defense of the humanities" (56). As well as underpinning the students' "close affective bonds and their altruistic behaviour ... the humanities also humanize" (Whitehead 56).

However, like the students misguided belief in the human value of heterosexuality, *Never Let Me Go* ultimately questions "the value of the arts and the humanities" in authenticating the human (Whitehead 57). According to Black, the novel "shares in a pervasive late-twentieth-century cultural skepticism about the viability of empathetic art" but without abandoning art's ethical value entirely (785-86). Tommy can no more prove his human worth through his frenzied drawings of "imaginary animals" (176) than can he, Kathy or any student reproduce the crowning image of the human's heteronormative future: the child. Their art remains an expression of their inauthentic humanness, like the innards of "a radio set" as Kathy describes Tommy's animals: "tiny canals, weaving tendons, miniature screws and wheels" (184-85). Less-than-human creativity allows "the darker realization that art,

along with the empathy it provokes, needs to escape the traditional concept of the human” (Black 786). Tommy’s art escapes human representationalism but his animal drawings unwittingly replicate the gaze of the human, which traditionally objectifies its nonhuman others (see Wolfe *Posthumanism* 133-34; *Animal* 2-3). The “obsessive precision” of the animals’ inner workings (Ishiguro 185) betrays the novel’s “corporeal fetishism” of the less-than-human (Griffin, “Science” 655). Tommy draws himself, his animalised and manufactured body laid bare for all to see. As Robbie Goh writes, the students’ souls are “irrelevant in the face of their fixed and commodified bodily identities” (65). As Griffin puts it, they are “merely their bodies” (655).

The myth of a deferral from organ donating rests upon the intersection of heterosexuality and art. Kathy, Ruth and Tommy hear about deferrals from Chrissie and Rodney, a couple at the Cottages. Chrissie describes how “in special circumstances” Hailsham students can apply for a deferral from donation for several years, “[s]o long as you *qualified*” (150 emphasis in original). This peculiar qualification requires a couple to prove their heterosexual romantic love. Chrissie continues: “if you were a boy and a girl, and you were in love with each other, really, properly in love, and if you could show it, then the people who run Hailsham, they sorted it out for you” (151). Chrissie repeats the phrase “properly in love” (151), continuing the novel’s fixation upon the proper form of intimacy and the anxiety of proving its veracity. Tommy and Kathy come to believe that the art they made at Hailsham for Madame’s gallery will prove their love. Tommy tells Madame and Miss Emily that art must be the evidence they consider when evaluating an application for deferral. Art is “so you could tell,” he tells them, “So you’d have something to go on. Otherwise how would you know when students came to you and said they were in

love?" (248). Madame's gallery is crucial to Hailsham's mythology because it unites humanising self-expression with heterosexual intimacy, neither of which warrants saving students from death. Deferrals do not exist. Carroll argues that deferrals embody "the ruthless logic of heteronormativity" ("Imitations" 67) which is ultimately a "spurious logic" (68). Tommy and Kathy are always already condemned to an improper existence and excluded, well in advance of their application for a deferral, from the privileged notions of proper love and proper humanity.

Deferrals promise a reprieve from condemnation by invoking another performative speech act. Deferrals rely upon establishing the veracity of a romantic speech act. Students seek to delay their donations by proving their intimate utterance of "I love you." Lisa Fletcher describes "I love you" as "romance's defining performative" utterance (36), which takes the form of "a persistently heterosexualized formula" (34). "I love you" is a persistently reiterative speech act, spoken again and again by lovers to establish the truth and originality of their relationship. In the novel, the rumour of deferrals exists through persistent declarations of student love. The rumour is resuscitated over and over, as Miss Emily explains: "I came to believe that this rumour, it's not just a single rumour. What I mean is, I think it's one that gets created from scratch over and over" (252). *Never Let Me Go* replicates romance's heterosexualised invocation of "I love you" but nullifies its utterance; their language, like their art and their love, is deemed illegitimate. In his analysis of Derrida's formulation of "I love you," J. Hillis Miller describes how love's speech act is always plagued by a problem of veracity: declaring love "is always implicitly, even sometimes explicitly, accompanied by something like 'I swear to you that what I say is true'" (135). By anthropocentrism's exclusory hierarchies, less-than-human clones cannot substantiate the truth or authenticity of their emotional experience;

ontologically, they are constructed as unoriginal objects who speak with inauthentic language. Deferrals reveal “I love you” to be an implicitly anthropocentric formula. Declaring less-than-human love cannot counteract the novel’s governing utterance, “I condemn you.”

Hailsham itself comes to stand for a failed speech act. It symbolises the failure of a promise to protect those it nonetheless allows to be killed. The school prides itself on its humane ethical project, having “challenged” (256) and “fought” the cruelty of the donations programme (258). Miss Emily tells Kathy and Tommy that “we sheltered you during those years, and we gave you your childhoods. ... You built your lives on what we gave you. You wouldn’t be who you are today if we’d not protected you” (263). Hailsham makes an implicit peripformative utterance to its students: “I promise (to protect you)” from the inhumane demands upon your bodies. The school stands for a “hail,” an imploring call for others to treat less-than-human lives better and to recognise their ethical standing. But given the novel’s regulation by “I condemn you,” such a “hail” is always already a “sham.” Furthermore this “sham” is venerated and commendable, for to “hail” something is to praise and hold it in “high regard” (Toker and Chertoff 165). As Query writes, Hailsham’s humane justification for sheltering students “reveals the weakness and even danger of liberal humanist empathy” (166). Hailsham’s brief but humanising shelter is better than nothing, as Miss Emily rationalises: “You wouldn’t have become absorbed in your lessons, you wouldn’t have lost yourselves in your art and your writing” (263). The school doles out “kindhearted condemnation” (Query 171). Hailsham’s promise upholds humanist empathy as absolutely essential, regardless of humanism’s failures and willful exclusions.

The school's promise of care conceals its involvement in the donations programme. Hailsham protects and nurtures its charges but remains complicit in the large-scale killing of students, much like ethical farming practices still condone the killing of nonhuman livestock, rebranded as humane, sustainable, cruelty-free and "happy meat" (see Pilgrim 112). In a sense, Hailsham is in the business of producing "happy" organs. The novel ominously suggests that schools like Hailsham are an exception, inferring that other students are kept in far worse conditions in large "government houses" (265). Hailsham's students actively work to uphold and reiterate Hailsham's false promise. Kathy takes pride in her caring work, which will ultimately demand her own death. She is quietly proud that her donors tend to do "much better than expected" with "impressive" post-donation recovery times and with very few of them "classified as 'agitated,' even before fourth donation" (3). Reminiscing over their time at Hailsham, Kathy and Laura, both carers, hug each other, "quite spontaneously, not so much to comfort one another, but as a way of affirming Hailsham, the fact that it was still there in both our memories" (207). In their work, they affirm the school's broken promise of care and protection as they comfort donors to and from the operating table.

Through troubling the category of the human and exposing the precariousness of those lives excluded from the properly human community, *Never Let Me Go* emphasises that its posthuman students are complicit in the power structures that conspire to render their lives worthless. Kathy's posthuman narration is written against the conventional human grain of the novelistic form, but the pride she takes in her work exposes her role in the perpetuation of human privilege. Kathy's job, like all carers, is to facilitate the procurement of body parts for other humans. She assists the health service to extract its flesh and ultimately, is complicit in the very structures of

condemnation that will inevitably kill her. Posthuman work (ostensibly an avenue towards agency and self-definition for the improperly human worker) is carried out in the service of an agenda organised by the ideology of the normatively human—an idea that the novel exposes as impossible to maintain. This is the uncomfortable but necessary fate of the posthuman: to be perennially bound to the human in a relation of subservience and disruption.

CHAPTER THREE

Human Appetites and the Posthuman Body: Michel Faber's *Under the Skin*

“Just the road and the wide world, empty,” observes Isserley, as she trawls the roads of the Scottish Highlands for male hitchhikers (Faber, *Under* 6). She is the strange protagonist of Michel Faber’s gruesome novel, *Under the Skin* (2000), which introduces her as a promiscuous woman. As it turns out, however, her presence on the roads is far from an expression of sexual freedom or the feminist empowerment afforded by mobility to traverse that “wide world” literally and politically. Isserley travels the highways for her work, but with dire consequences for her body and human status. “Inescapably, there was a price to be paid,” she remarks, “for sitting upright at the wheel of a motor car” (127). The novel gradually reveals the specifics of the “price” Isserley has paid, eventually disclosing that Isserley is an alien predator surgically remade to resemble a human woman.

Her characterisation recalls other lone female characters on the roads of Britain in recent fiction. In the latter half of Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* (2005), Kathy H spends many solitary hours driving across England to care facilities and hospitals for her work. Travel is an intrinsic part of her character: “Soon enough, the long hours, the travelling, the broken sleep have all crept into your being and become part of you, so everyone can see it, in your posture, your gaze, the way you move and talk” (203). Hilary Mantel’s *Beyond Black* (2005) opens on protagonist Alison Hart being driven through the outskirts of London. As with Isserley and Kathy, she travels for her work, as a spiritual medium. Her sense of personal limbo is palpable, emanating from the depiction of constricted borderland space: “Travelling: the dank oily days after Christmas. The motorway, its wastes looping London: the margin’s

scrub-grass flaring orange in the lights This is marginal land The life forms here are rejects, or anomalies” (1). For Alison, her mobility on the road seeps into her character and her experience of her body: “the space the road encloses is the space inside her: the arena of combat, the wasteland, the place of civil strife behind her ribs” (2). This metaphor maps marginal space upon the female body, echoing the experience of Isserley and Kathy. Their experience of the road is constructed by the demands placed upon their bodies. Both Ishiguro’s and Faber’s novels use the image of a woman on the margins to index the problematic human status of their central characters. These depictions of women on the road are far from the hopeful sense of escape envisioned by Alexandra Ganser, who argues that women’s road narratives are painted as both “pleasurable and empowering, as a chance for personal discovery and exploration, and as cultural critique” (14). *Under the Skin* drastically eschews this kind of optimism, and latches on to the image of a lone woman on the road—traditionally a masculine space—to launch its critique of the human.

In this sense, both Ishiguro and Faber engage the “mythical ‘open road’ as a textual space in which powerful regimes of gender, cultural and social difference are destabilized” (Ganser 14). The tenuous mobility exercised by Kathy and Isserley comes to shape their posthuman subjectivity. A less-than-human clone, Kathy works in the traditionally female role of carer, which demands that she travel across England. By contrast, Isserley crosses a gendered line to become a predator on the hunt for hunky men in Scotland. These narratives envisage a restricting spatiality for their posthuman women, and depict the human as caught between predacity and vulnerability. Both women facilitate the harvesting of “meat” from human bodies: Kathy works for a nationwide healthcare system that extracts organs from living clones and Isserley works for a meat industry that farms human livestock.

This chapter reads *Under the Skin* as a fiction of the posthuman body. The novel constructs the body of the predator as a posthuman hybrid: Isserley's body is disabled and ambiguously sexed, painfully caught between the human and nonhuman animal. Faber's novel also pursues its critique of the human through repositioning human men as farmed food animals. This bold fictional premise allows the novel to problematise its key terms: "human" and "animal" are made to signify in both unobvious and slippery ways.

Under the Skin proceeds through a slow reveal, gradually laying Isserley bare. She works for Ablach Farm, an alien farming operation on Earth that supplies human meat to the upper classes of her home planet. By the novel's logic, these aliens are "human" and humans are rebranded a species of "dumb animals" (237) called vodrels, effectively "vegetables on legs" (171). To hunt for muscly specimens to be fattened up at the farm, Isserley has been surgically modified to pass as a human. She picks up male hitchhikers and sifts through their conversation to isolate men with limited social connections. If they fulfil this screening process, the men are tranquilised by Isserley and taken to Ablach Farm for processing. As well as having their tongues cut out, the men are "shaved, castrated, intestinally modified, [and] chemically purified" (97) to standardise the farm's meat product. The novel reveals these grislier details in parallel with the arrival of Amlis Vess, the son of Isserley's employer. Vess's arrival disrupts the narrative world's status quo. Appearing as the novel ramps up its interest in the intersection of meat and sex, he is an idealistic vegetarian and an object of desire to Isserley. After Isserley is violently raped by a hitchhiker, she abandons the farm and crashes her car. The novel closes with Isserley trapped behind the wheel, horrifically injured, and contemplating an explosive suicide.

Scholarship about *Under the Skin* is sparse. Analyses of the novel have persistently read the text in relation to its use of genre, which marks Faber's fictional output more broadly. As Richard Bradford writes, *Under the Skin* "reflects a robust determination to resist classification" (171) and Jules Smith observes that Faber's books "can be read as hybrid thrillers, gothic tales with touches of romance and horror, the ghost story, and even science fiction." Faber himself is contemptuous of classifying fiction. Speaking with the *Scottish Review of Books*, he rails against the "dangerous distinction" between literary and popular literature. In an interview with David Soyka, he refuses to classify *Under the Skin* as science fiction and barely conceals a scathing animosity for genre fiction:

I would never have signed a contract with a publisher that contemplated marketing *Under the Skin* as SF [science fiction].... No amount of money is worth what that label inflicts on the work of a serious writer It's not about whether you're willing to stand up and defend SF, it's about whether you're willing to sit back and watch your work ending up on the bookseller shelves with the *Babylon 5* tie-ins.

In spite of these authorial protestations, the small body of scholarship surrounding the novel has repeatedly drawn attention to its "highly marketable sci-fi skin" (Harger-Grinling and Jordaan 246). "Despite Faber's denial, however," writes Sarah Dillon, "*Under the Skin*, with its story of an alien species farming humans on Earth for meat, is clearly science fiction" ("Question" 134). In this sense, *Under the Skin* continues the trend for novels of the posthuman to scavenge from disparate fictional modes.

Under the Skin's forthright critique of the human has attracted some critical interest. Dillon offers the most extensive analysis of the novel to date, examining the intersection of language and species difference. Literature is a privileged site for

giving voice to the often animalised other, she argues: “the division between human and nonhuman animals” is “a division *created by* language, not a distinction based on the possession of language” (“Question” 135 emphasis in original). Dillon recognises the novel’s combative insistence on ambiguity when it comes to the mobilisation of the human. She describes Isserley as “transspeciesed” (135), which emphasises the inbetween-ness of Isserley’s posthuman status and body. She is both human and nonhuman, as indeed are the farmed hitchhikers, thus rupturing the human/nonhuman binary. The novel’s literary effect emanates from this impossible yet playful doubling of the signification of “human.” As Wendy Woodward writes, the “ongoing reversal of nomenclature in *Under the Skin* constitutes an ontological source of dis-ease for the reader throughout” (54). *Under the Skin* dehumanises the human, denying its reader the language they use to define themselves as human and their anthropocentric place in the world. Jonathan Glazer’s 2013 art-house film adaptation of the novel capitalises on this sense of the human’s estrangement from itself. It is as if, as Jonathan Romney writes, Glazer’s film asks, “[w]hat would a truly alien cinema be like?” (22).

However, critics have so far overlooked how ideas of the posthuman shape Faber’s novel. *Under the Skin* is ruthless in taking apart the human, bodily and philosophically. Faber’s novel represents what Boxall describes as an “emergent hybridity” of the human in twenty-first-century novels, marked in fiction by a “fascination” with “the image and the conception of the disassembled body, the body which comes apart” (101). By reading the novel’s depiction of the surgically reconstructed body, hunting and meat production, I argue that *Under the Skin* exposes the flexibility of the species boundary between the human and the nonhuman. The novel thus mounts a posthumanist critique of the human’s purported ontological

purity, and lays bare the human's investment in normative constructions of the abled body, sex, desire and consumption practices.

Under the Knife: Surgery, Sex, Species

"She was a weird one all right," remarks one of Isserley's hitchhikers, crudely assessing her appearance: "Half Baywatch babe, half little old lady" (12). Isserley's "weird" body unites two popular extremes of the gendered feminine body. For men such as the hitchhiker, her body solicits misogynistic desire and disgruntled repulsion. After ogling her breasts, which are "ripe" (11) and like "two moons" (13), the hitchhiker notes that "the rest of her was a funny shape" (12). Her arms are too long, her elbows and wrists markedly "knobbly," and her eyes bulge to "twice normal size" behind strangely thick glasses (12). Her hands are abnormally large "but narrow too, like ... chicken feet. And tough like she'd done hard labour with them" (12). Isserley's impression that she "blend[s] in perfectly" and successfully passes as a human woman is only partly accurate (71). As bait, her breasts ensure a degree of success for luring in a particular kind of heterosexual man, bent on assessing Isserley's viability as a sexual object. Her physical abnormalities codify her body as disabled, by which the novel indexes the hybridity of her species identity. Surgery has sculpted her gender and disability, both of which conspire to reveal her body as both alien and human. Her post-surgical transspecies body draws attention to the glut of human privilege associated with unambiguous sex and able-bodied identity.

Surgery crafts a painful body for Isserley. Physically remade to resemble her human prey, she is in constant pain. Radically different to the wolfish morphology of her kin, her body is "surgically made vertical" (110) with "half [her] backbone amputated and metal pins inserted into what was left" (127). The novel represents

post-surgical embodiment as a condition of estrangement and intense claustrophobia: Isserley is “trapped in a cage of her own bone and muscle” (143). Descriptions of intense visceral discomfort punctuate the narrative and repeatedly draw attention to Isserley’s spine. Standing upright sends “a shock of pain through her spine” (38). The pain is depicted with violent imagery of punctured and penetrated flesh: a “long needle of pain stab[s] through the base of her spine, the amputation site” (144) and shoots “down her spine, like a skewer piercing her from ribcage to rectum” (232).

Her experience of pain indicates her compromised human status and her lack of bodily control. Historically, losing control of the body and being overwhelmed by feeling has indicated marginalised subject positions. As Chen writes, “[f]or the ‘human,’ feeling must ... forever be in battle with rationality” where “responsibilities of feeling” are foisted upon “lower places” of hierarchised life: “women, animals, racialized men, disabled people” (46). Isserley’s sensations are deranged by spinal agony. She is “half blinded by a stab of pain in her spine” (140) and feels music “keening nauseously into her spine” (220). Aural descriptions intensify Isserley’s experience of her body as the bones in her back audibly grind through muscle and scar tissue: “Her vertebrae shifted and clicked, a sickening gristle sound trapped deep inside the flesh” (249). She comes to experience her post-surgical body as meat-like, with the “sickening gristle” of her form stabbed, pierced and skewered by her work in the meat industry.

Ablach Farm itself is codified as a place of maimed bodies. “Ablach” is a Scottish Gaelic word that names “a mangled carcass,” “a body not necessarily dead but maimed or reduced to a pitiable condition” and “an insignificant or contemptible person” (“Ablach,” def. 1-3). The farm’s name not only references the Scottish setting but is a covert marker of the novel’s thematic interest in disassembled human bodies.

In this way, Ablach Farm performs a similar narrative function to Hailsham House in Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*. As I suggest in Chapter Two, Hailsham's name conceals the school's failed promise to protect its less-than-human students. Similarly, Ablach Farm cites mutilated human bodies, which the novel delivers in abundance. The farm and the school are both biopolitical institutions that control and kill dehumanised persons, who are obliquely referenced by the names "Ablach" and "Hailsham."

Isserley's agonising form is characterised as a disabled body. Through the persistent return to her spine as the site of concentrated pain and compromised mobility, the novel rehearses entrenched associations surrounding disability where subjectivity and agency are inextricable (Chen 48-49; Kaplan 303; Shildrick, *Dangerous* 19; Wolfe, *Posthumanism* 138). Isserley is presented by the narrative as an "ugly freak" (92), "mutilated cripple" (284) and "a cerebral palsy sufferer" (203). "Negativity and death," writes Chen, "attach to disabled bodies with terrible regularity" (220). Disability is rendered in conventionally negative terms, legitimated by humanism's historical privileging of able-bodied-ness.

Furthermore, the surgical construction of her human body pathologises femininity. Isserley's gendered body becomes a significant aspect of how her differently abled body registers: she is the "denuded freak, the gargoyle girl" (93). Imagined as a nonhuman monster with a chiselled body of stone, the less abled feminine body is positioned as less alive than other bodies. Lying in the bath, her prosthetic breasts are "rocks in the ocean, revealed by the tide. Stones on her chest, pushing her down" (250). Her breasts seem to push through her body like "alien mounds of flesh" and "artificial tumours bulging out of her" (250). Through Isserley, the feminised and disabled body is imagined as malignant and nonliving.

Shildrick writes, “[i]n signifying disease, trauma, and decay, the anomalous body is an uncomfortable reminder that the normative, ‘healthy,’ body, despite its appearance of successful self-determination, is highly vulnerable to disruption and breakdown” (*Dangerous* 43). For Shildrick, this means that “disability is always the object of institutionalized discourses of control and containment” which ultimately serve a normative understanding of the standard human body (43). As such, these discourses seek to regularise the unsettling possibilities embodied by the anomalous morphology of the other. Historically contextualised by “the standardizing impulses of modernity,” Shildrick describes how the so-called monstrous, deviant and freakish bodies of perceived anatomical and morphological error “must be recontained by strategies of normalisation” including “institutionalisation, reconstructive surgery, prosthetic aids and so on” (*Embodying* 23).¹ The posthumanist thrust of Shildrick’s critique lies not just with its examination of how the human polices its aberrant others, but also in how disability studies fundamentally impeaches the standardised norm of the human body. Shildrick argues that “the standard body ... has been unstable all along” (4)—an idea that disability studies, along with surgical and technological bodily interventions, persistently makes clear. Thus to maintain the properly human means ignoring the body itself, which a novel such as *Under the Skin* makes impossible.

Isserley’s body unites disability and animality in ways that resonate with critical posthumanism. Disability studies and animal studies have been essential to the

¹ It is worth noting here the broader significance of ideas of the prosthesis to posthumanism, which can be traced back to Haraway’s cyborg and the body’s entangling with machines and technology. More recently, Wolfe explores the notion of language itself as a constitutive prosthesis for the human (*Posthumanism* 295), as I describe in Chapter One.

emergence of contemporary posthumanist theory and yet, as Pick writes, tracing the connections between disability and animality remains an “undeveloped” project for theory (64). Philosophical exploitation of the disabled is a legitimate worry, as Licia Carlson describes: the intellectually disabled are frequently utilised to populate “the face of the beast” in discussions of animals and speciesism (132). The risk here, as Chen writes, is of a “repathologization or a validation of pathologization” for all kinds of disabled persons (214).

As Wolfe argues, disability studies and animal studies fruitfully expose the limitations of the subject modelled by liberal humanism. “[I]n doing so,” he writes, both these fields of study “call on us to rethink questions of ethical and political responsibility” (*Posthumanism* 127). Isserley is read by hitchhikers as differently abled: as a “suffering” victim of a “car accident” (29), as a person with cerebral palsy (203), and an injured worker with “buggered” hands, perhaps from “[c]hicken-plucking. Fish-gutting” (28). With this sinisterly apt recourse to the animal—Isserley is indeed in the business of procuring “animal” meat—the narrative divulges its interest in the intersections between disabled and animalised bodies.

The narrative overlaps the butchering of animals with the performance of surgery upon human bodies. The farm’s butcher makes this explicit: “A butcher has to be a bit of a surgeon, you know” (215). Botched surgery, as the narrative frequently mentions (42; 93; 150; 276), facilitates Isserley’s crossing of species boundaries. She characterises her bodily preparations for hunting as “push[ing] herself across the dividing line into bestiality” (250). Her post-surgical body’s capacity to pass as human is provisional at best, compromised by her unwitting presentation of a strangely disabled form. The novel undermines the notion of a singular “dividing line” between the human and the nonhuman, exemplifying Derrida’s insistence that

“[t]here is not *one* opposition between man and non-man; there are, between different organizational structures of living being, many fractures” (“Violence” 66 emphasis in original). Isserley’s body is a failed approximation of normative human morphology, marked with the signatures of her violently “humanising” surgery.

Surgery is a gendered mechanism of control in *Under the Skin*. The novel’s depiction of the post-surgical body focuses closely upon Isserley, permitting only brief mentions of a similar surgery performed on her male co-worker Esswis, who “went under the knife” a year before her (150). He is the public face of Ablach Farm: he is a recluse, “virtually a prisoner” (55) in “the Big House” of the farm (54) and suspected by outsiders to suffer “arthritis, a wooden leg, cancer” (55). While Esswis is largely confined to the farm, Isserley’s surgery permits her to range across the Highlands. In this sense, she is an ironic gesture to the feminist empowerment of women through work and agency, underscored by her role of hunter which is traditionally coded as masculine (as I discuss in the next section of this chapter). Unfamiliar with work, Isserley is used to her home planet’s social structures where a beautiful feminine body guarantees favour with the “Elite,” the powerful upper classes (67). Her “lush and glossy birthright” of a furry pelt had marked her with the privileges of class and the attentions of men, with “her passage into a bright future” seemingly secured as “a matter of physical inevitability” (67). After surgery, her constrictive body is also an exaggerated expression of the idea that feminine beauty is a painful and often impossible achievement—the idea that women work hard to pass as desirable women. Surgery not only carves a crude “animal” body from Isserley’s proper “human” form to push her across the boundary of species, but cuts her in the shape of a woman. Moreover, the surgery is specifically designed to craft her body as

sexually desirable to the male “animals” she hunts. Through this flirtation with bestiality, her body is painfully overdetermined as human, nonhuman and feminine.

Under the Skin frequently returns to Isserley’s ambiguous and medically constructed sex. She is afraid of her co-workers at the farm snatching glimpses of her modified genitalia: they would “just love to see what the surgeons had done to her below the waist!” (93). Lying in the bath, she tries not to “touch or examine” the “tangle of knotted flesh between her legs” (252). The “soft genital slit” of her vagina (251) is “buried forever inside a mass of ugly scar tissue caused by the amputation of her tail” (186). The narrative features multiple scenes of Isserley bathing, in which she gives “special attention to the scar-lines and alien clefts in which she had a dangerous lack of sensation: places where infections could grow and where wounds that had never quite healed could slyly venture open” (147). In its post-surgical propensity to remain unhealed and “open,” her body recalls historicised notions of women’s bodies as unmanageable and “sly.” The novel redeploys the cultural coding of the female body as a threat to the bodily integrity of the autonomous human.

As Shildrick writes, “the perception that women’s bodies are always already leaky, and anomalous, threatening to overflow the proper boundaries of embodiment and separation, indicates not a gender specific condition of being, but the insecurity of all bodies” (*Dangerous* 57). In a similar vein Grosz describes how the female body has been traditionally characterised as “a leaking, uncontrollable, seeping liquid: as formless flow ... lacking not so much or simply the phallus but self-containment ... a formlessness that engulfs all form, a disorder that threatens all order” (*Volatile* 203). The novel’s references to vaginal “alien clefts” and infectious wounds depict the female body as dangerous, nonhuman and likely to split open, citing entrenched and problematic ideas of the vagina as a bleeding wound. “Slyness” also describes the

nonhuman agency of scar tissue, which threatens Isserley's control over her body with the unsanctioned movement of unhealed wounds "slyly ventur[ing] open." This widespread scarring represents the risk of the creation of new orifices in the female body.

Through Isserley, *Under the Skin* thus evokes a dual sense of the trans body in relation to species and sex. The fiction of a transspecies human/alien hybrid relies upon the image of transgenitalia, which challenges normative notions of the human body. As Chen writes, "the genitals bear tremendous symbolic weight" and are "directly tied to social orders that are vastly more complex than systems of gender alone" (137). This is not "to evacuate trans of its gendered possibilities" as Chen makes clear, but to demonstrate (as many critics have done in the wake of Freudian psychoanalysis) that "sexual organs simultaneously impute both gender and sexuality" as well as "race and class" (137). In short, genitalia are "culturally overdetermined" markers of human difference but their significance extends across species boundaries (137). As Chen points out, "as the seats of reproduction and fecundity, [the genitals] are sites of biopolitical interest not only for humans but for nonhuman animals" (137). The sexual organs represent a key site for the management of the human/nonhuman binary, with clearly defined genitalia persistently associated with normative constructions of the human.

Chen provocatively asserts that discussions of transsexualism frequently avoid the question of species. She writes that methods of "bodily transformation"—such as transsexuality, "nonnormative body modification practices" and cosmetic surgery—are haunted by "the significance of castration or the 'cutting' of some kinds of transsexuality: 'neutering' and 'spaying,' which is often considered by municipal policy makers and animal advocates" (136). As McHugh asks from a

“posthumanistic” perspective, where does the “threshold of sexual difference” intersect with “the thresholds of species differences” (*Animal* 119)?

As I write in Chapter One, McHugh explains how neutering companion animals ensures a kind of faithfulness in domesticated pets for their owners. Curiously this aligns the cutting of nonhuman sexual organs with heteronormative monogamy (*Animal* 117). Similarly, the intimacy humans share with companion species such as dogs relies upon the animal being “reproductively silenced” as Haraway puts it (“Companion” 94). The domesticated animal is no longer sexually “intact” (191), and as Haraway and Wolfe discuss, a form of “nonreproductive sex” becomes constitutive to the bonding of human and nonhuman lives in Haraway’s formulation of companion species (224). Haraway writes of how her dog’s “darter-tongue kisses have been irresistible” (“Companion” 93) as a kind of “oral intercourse” where the dog’s tongue “swab[s] the tissues of [her] tonsils” (94). Through this “forbidden conversation” (94), the species divide is revealed as porous as the dog “continues to colonize all [Haraway’s] cells” (93; see also Haraway, “Encounters”). Cutting genitalia, then, suggests a method of bodily control of human and nonhuman lives, but also another avenue for exposing the implosion of the human/nonhuman binary. The ontological purity of species is exposed as a fantasy.

Drawing comparisons between the cuts of neutering and sex reassignment surgery is dangerous territory. As Chen recognises, the relevance of the neutering cut is “often construed as tendentious when applied to humans” (136). However, branding such associations “tendentious” too easily assumes that all members of the human species are recognised as fully human subjects, which is clearly not the case. Neutering reigns in impulsive sexualities of nonhuman animals in a similar fashion to the sexual regulation of “so-called aberrant or degenerate humans” (McHugh, *Animal*

117) which has traditionally included women, racial minorities, people with disability and non-heterosexual people. Evoking the “dance between *queer* and *trans*” (135 emphasis in original), Chen describes how the “ostensibly compromised capacity for ‘biological’ reproductive sexuality” of non-heterosexual persons “might be likened to neutered” (134). Problematically, transsexual and intersex surgery are shadowed by this broader desire to manage bodies and sexualities perceived to be less human than others.

Under the Skin is fixated on cutting. Isserley’s sexuality is repurposed to capitalist ends by the surgeon’s knife. Isserley’s commitment to her employer is inscribed in her body and her mutilated sexual organs through surgical cutting. As well as the amputation of her tail, the “skin on the edge of her hand[s], along her pinkie and down to the wrist, had a horny smoothness” from the severing of her sixth fingers (42) and the “scarred flesh from her amputated teats was dimpled and tough, like the torso of a lean, well-muscled vodsels who kept away from alcohol and fatty feed” (252). Her transspecies body is described here as transgendered through her resemblance to a well-muscled male abdomen. Describing sex reassignment surgery, Shildrick writes how “the corporeal cut is not destructive as such but precisely a means of subjectivisation” for “the transgressive body” (*Dangerous* 117). Cutting destroys Isserley’s sex organs in order to build her a body for hunting and the economic success of the farm.

Cutting Isserley constructs a transgressive body that refuses correction and stabilisation. As Shildrick explains, transsexual and intersex surgery “seek to stabilise gender by way of fixing biological sex” (*Dangerous* 117). In a very strong sense, Isserley’s body is unfixable and its disruptions reverberate throughout the novel. The cut body haunts *Under the Skin*. Although the novel eschews direct representation of

the cutting of her female genitalia, its incision is felt in the depiction of a male hitchhiker's castration. His body is paralysed "except for the autonomic squirming of his testes inside the shrinking scrotal sac" (213) which is "sliced open" by a scalpel's "rapid, delicate, almost trembling incisions" to remove the testes (214). Isserley unwittingly repeats the carving of her own body as she shaves her face of fur to pass as a human female. With "delicate, tender scrapes," she "drag[s] the razor across" her face (251) which implicitly echoes the scraping of surgical scalpels that buried her genitalia beneath sculptural scar tissue.

Her buried vagina reappears in the representation of the farm's underground spaces. Descending beneath the earth in the farm's elevator is like entering "a narrow fissure between two strata of compacted rock" (166). The subterranean setting for the farm's infrastructure—kitchen, dining hall, livestock enclosures and abattoir—has been "burrowed out" by male workers (168). The deepest level, where the hitchhikers are kept, is a dark "fissure far beneath the ground" (173). The elevator slides "through the well-oiled, frictionless shaft," its closed doors described as a "seam that would open" (210). These descriptions of slick and claustrophobic fissures recall Isserley's unruly body of sexualised scars, vaginal clefts and opening wounds.

Isserley's dream about "the subterranean hell of the Estates" continues this gendering of underground space (117). The Estates operate as an oxygen factory on Isserley's planet, where the lower classes work to provide breathable air for the upper classes (118). Isserley dreams that she is trapped in "the dark centre of the factory, the smooth cervix of a giant concrete crater" (118). The factory's concrete "cervix" is characterised by a rampant nonhuman fecundity, "filled with a luminous stew of decomposing plant matter" and "obese leaves" that convulse "like beached manta rays" (118). The vaginal centrepiece of the factory, "this great churning cavity," is

covered with “[h]uge roots and tubers” shining with “albumescent gleet” as “blueish gas” is “ejaculated” into the air (118). Isserley notices “hundreds of tubes, thick as industrial hose, draped over the rim” (118). This misogynistic gendering of the subterranean factory imagines the vagina as an industrious and diseased organ that is uncontrollably sexual. It sustains life through the production of oxygen, but is also a repulsive maw of illness and venereal disease. Billows of gas ejaculate “from sudden interruptions in the surface” of the cervix, which is filled with “glutinous murk” and “gleet” (118): a slimy discharge associated with sexually transmitted infections, phlegm and open wounds (“Gleet,” def. 1-3). Isserley’s “revulsion” for the industrial cavity reflects her disgust for her own body and her own buried vagina (118).

This displacement of the female body participates in what Chen describes as culture’s obsession with the symbolism of genitalia. She writes, “[g]enitality is both directly and indirectly represented in multiple ways, vanishing here, reappearing there, sometimes prosthetized through other accoutrements” (137). As Isserley’s sexual capacity is evacuated and scraped closed, the novel turns to the underground to reinscribe strong associations between the body of woman and cave-like spaces. As Ralph Crane and Fletcher observe, caves have long been “claimed as settings for key stages in an overarching human story” in which caves are rarely just caves (18) and where a negative gender politics appears to be at work. They are frequently used by literature “as symbols of the womb and the tomb” (Crane and Fletcher 127). Crane and Fletcher read an implicit inclusion of caves in Sigmund Freud’s “suite of dream images representing the female body” (Crane and Fletcher 16), alongside “cavities, ships, and all kinds of vessels” (Freud 233). The farm’s underground space becomes a cave of carnal industry, where the female sex organs are imagined geologically as tunnelled out from earth and stone.

Rendering the female body as nonhuman is nothing new. This metonymic strategy registers the sexist politics of the figure of the human. The novel employs familiar cultural associations of the smell of brininess with genitalia, and specifically female genitalia, to intensify its construction of the cave-like underground as a displaced vagina. Ablach's slaughterhouse is not characterised by the coppery stink of blood. Light "flood[s] and "rushe[s] to fill" the underground space "like a tide of seawater" (167). There is "a hint of marine tang" (210) and "a horrible fake aroma of sea-spray" in the subterranean air (220). Isserley smells of seawater, as a hitchhiker notices: he can "smell the sea on [her] clothes" (29), "[f]resh today," and guesses that she "live[s] by the sea, definitely" (28). Another hitchhiker notes her strong smell—"she stank, really"—of "fermenting sweat and seawater" (201). As Grosz remarks, "women's corporeality" has persistently been "inscribed as a mode of seepage" (*Volatile* 203). In this way, Grosz describes entrenched and misogynistic fears of a female body that overflows its proper borders and contaminates the ontological purity of the masculinised ideal human.

Isserley's difficult body pervades the narrative. In the rock pools near the farm, Isserley plucks a whelk from the "glacial brine" and lifts "it up to her mouth, venturing the tip of her tongue into its glaireous hole" (63). As another sexualised opening, the mouth of the whelk is coated in a slimy or "glaireous" liquid like the white of an egg ("Glair," def. 1-2). In a novel that denies its female protagonist pleasure, her tasting of the shellfish becomes a nonhuman metaphor of autoerotic stimulation and lesbian erotics. The body is rarely a vehicle for pleasure in *Under the Skin*. For the briefest of moments, the novel suggests the possibility of sexual autonomy for Isserley—concealed, as if in the shell of a whelk, within the sexist alignment of women and the nonhuman.

On the Prowl: Hunting and Sexuality

Isserley has an “appetite for the game” (39): she is a hunter, employed to prowl the Highlands and abduct lonely male hitchhikers for fattening and slaughter. Her “appetite” is gastronomic and sexual; human flesh is a high-end delicacy and abducting men is erotically thrilling for Isserley. *Under the Skin* is an allegory of meat eating and industrial meat consumption (as I discuss in the next section of this chapter), but the flesh in question is of a particular provenance. Hunted meat holds a privileged position in contemporary culinary culture, signifying the calls of ethical food movements for people to eat locally and to come face to face with the protein on their plates. Hunting signifies the increasing accountability of the human consumer but also the reversion to a more conservative notion of the human based upon the masculine predator and the feminised animal other. However, *Under the Skin* subverts this gendered binary. Isserley takes the “human” role of hunter while human men become her prey. By examining the representation of hunting and meat eating, I suggest that consumption practices animate *Under the Skin*’s construction of the human. Through consumption, Faber’s novel imagines the human as a carnal species hungry for meat and sex, while also participating in broader concerns with human accountability to other species in the Anthropocene.

Hunting emphasises the human exceptionalism of the hunter within a world of nonhuman abundance. In the novel, the A9 highway cannot “be trusted to stay empty for long” (1-2), carving its way through a forested landscape. Dead animals litter the road, foreshadowing the dead human livestock to come: “Furry carcasses of unidentifiable forest creatures littered the asphalt, fresh every morning, each of them a frozen moment in time when some living thing had mistaken the road for its natural

habitat” (2). A hitchhiker appears suddenly by the side of the road, “metamorphos[ing] suddenly from a tree-branch or a tangle of debris” into an upright figure “with its arm extended” (3). Dehumanised in this way, the hitchhiker becomes similar to other nonhuman animals that cluster around the highway. Isserley imagines her own exceptionalism within such an environment: “It was as if she had been set down on a world so newly finished that the mountains might still have some shifting to do and the wooded valleys might yet be recast as seas” (2). While intimating her position as alien, her pleasure in the nonhuman world (which runs throughout the novel) also operates as an expression of human exceptionalism. The Highlands have a “prehistoric stillness” (2), cast as a place of pre-human emptiness, a nebulous and still-shifting landscape free from the conventional markers of anthropocentric history. The impression of pre-human timelessness is echoed by the animal road kill, which are each described as “a frozen moment in time” (2). For the hitchhikers taken by Isserley, the road similarly marks the place where their lives as humans are halted, as they are shunted sideways into the foreshortened lifespan of a farmable animal.

Under the Skin suggests that stories of hunting bleed into images of sexual predation. According to Sherryl Vint, the novel “plays with the way sexual pursuit and predation are linked, but its focus moves from gender difference to species difference” (2). However the novel is by no means evacuated of the gendered significance of predation, particularly in terms of the novel’s depiction of hunting. Vint argues that the novel is more interested in the human/nonhuman binary than the male/female binary, but acknowledges that Faber’s novel “remind[s] us of how these two hierarchies are entwined in western cultural systems” (2). Questions of species difference can erase other forms of difference, as I argue in Chapter One. *Under the Skin* problematises such an erasure, refusing to let questions of sex and gender slide.

Sexual desire readily imputes violence against those lives that are regarded as nonhuman in Faber's novel. *Under the Skin* flirts with the reader's narrative expectations from the outset, as the representation of Isserley as an unconventional sexual predator—a lone woman—collapses into the novel's horrific conceit. The opening chapters establish a voyeuristic narrative world saturated with sexualised language. Isserley's predatory intentions are suggested through her sexually suggestive method of appraising a male hitchhiker. To "give herself time to size him up" (1), she drives past her mark and takes "a mental photograph" before looping back along the road to "size him up a second time" (3) like a predator circling its prey. "Coming from the opposite direction," particular physical attributes attract her gaze: "Isserley might catch a glimpse of his buttocks, or his thighs, or maybe how well-muscled his shoulders were. There was something in the stance, too, that could indicate the cocky self-awareness of a male in prime condition" (4). "Buttocks," "thighs" and shoulder musculature suggest a sexual assessment of a masculine body in "prime condition" defined by physical maturity and virility. Isserley savours "the thought of how superb he'd be once he was naked" (5) but checks herself to make sure she isn't "pumping him up in her imagination" (5). The language throughout this opening chapter suggests a voyeuristic fascination with male sexuality. The hitchhiker's muscled body suggests more than just a "cocky" attitude, just as the description of Isserley's imagination performing a "pumping" action on the hitchhiker suggests a fantasy of sexual action.

In a narrative feint, the novel suggests that a ravenous sexual appetite motivates Isserley. She is on the hunt for "big muscles: a hunk on legs" (1); she yearns for a "stud" (33). As a "man-eater," she is a praying mantis-like figure, which is an entrenched cultural image of dangerous female sexuality. As Grosz describes,

the nonhuman image of the insect is culturally associated “above all, with the fantasy of the *vagina dentata*; with orality, digestion, and incorporation” (*Space* 191 emphasis in original). Isserley, too, is characterised with an insatiable appetite: “She could have some magnificent brute sitting in her car ... knowing for sure that he was coming home with her, and she could already be thinking ahead to the next one” (4). She fantasises about “an even better prospect ... beckoning to her out there” (5), “visualizing herself already parked somewhere with a hunky young hitchhiker; she imagined herself breathing heavily against him as she smoothed his hair and grasped him round the waist to ease him into position” (7). Isserley and the novel both welcome these presumptions of sexual desire and roadside liaisons. A tranquilised hitchhiker slumps against her in the driver’s seat and resembles “an attempted kiss” (47). Sex provides Isserley with a legitimate cover story for her hunting: “Legally, you were allowed to do whatever you liked in a car, including have sex” (47). A driving manual reminds her that “[b]ehind the wheel of an automobile is no place for canoodling, necking, or ‘petting’” (47). This admonition of “canoodling” in the car betrays Isserley’s underlying intention. “Petting” is not only suggestive of sexual intimacy but signifies intimate human care for domesticated pet animals.

Men are objectified by Isserley’s sexualised surveillance. They are “specimens” and “fleshy biped[s]” (3). Their bodies are divided into discrete parts by her gaze, anticipating the butcher’s division of their bodies at the farm. Their hunter views them as livestock, as food animals, as walking cuts of meat. Her eyes are drawn to a “meaty rump” (32), to a “barrel-chested” body “with lots of exposed flesh” (76) and “more muscle mass packed in between his neck and hips” than most males (77). She notices “the steely density” of a neck (27) and a “superbly built” body that is “[d]eceptively lean, but all muscle” (43). The compartmentalised body becomes

undeniably sexualised as she assesses the size of male sex organs: “The bulge in his jeans was promising, although most of it was probably testicles” (10). The large penis, culturally coded as a signifier of masculine virility, promises gastronomic pleasure to Isserley. It is another cut of meat to the hunter’s gaze and framed by familiar narratives of sexual predation.

Furthermore, Isserley’s work on the highway is described as “cruising” (4; 71). A description of driving, “cruising” is also a slang term which describes the action of searching for a casual sexual partner, and especially a same-sex male partner (“Cruise,” def. 1d). As Dollimore writes, cruising is associated with anonymous and public seduction, loitering, following and “the potential for not so much a discovery of ... true self as a liberation *from* self, from a self-oppressive identity” (325 emphasis in original). Whilst historically a liberating sexual practice for gay men, cruising is also strongly aligned with death and the AIDS crisis as Dollimore describes (310). The novel’s use of the term further adds to the sexual enigma of the opening scenes, as well as the film adaptation which sees Scarlett Johansson cruising the streets of Glasgow. As Ara Osterweil writes of the film, “[t]hat Glazer’s images of female cruising are so startling is testament to the rarity of images of the active, sexual female gaze in popular cinema” (47). Used as a descriptor of hunting for meat, *Under the Skin* makes “cruising” sinister. The novel thus renders the desires of women and gay men dangerous and deadly. The citation of a term usually applied to stereotypical characterisations of male homosexual interaction as predatory, as superficial (with little regard for what others may be like “under the skin”) and defined by an insatiable appetite, suggests the operation of different and non-normative appetites at work within this novel. The idea of a “queer” appetite becomes a viable possibility.

Hunting is understood as an intensely masculine and heterosexual activity in Western culture. Critiquing several contemporary nonfiction narratives of meat consumption, Karyn Pilgrim examines a section of Susan Bourette's *Meat: A Love Story* (2008). As Pilgrim writes, Bourette becomes "a transgressor of gender" when "she assumes the role of hunter" (120). Invited moose hunting in Newfoundland, Bourette is a lone woman in an all-male hunting party. She is swiftly objectified in gendered terms by one of the men, who shouts, "Don't you think she'd look nice in a camo bikini?" (128). The collective gaze of the hunters makes Bourette feel like a hunted animal. Bourette writes, "For a moment I felt what the moose must feel when spotted by a guide and his party—not that I'm standing naked, just that I'm a target" (128). For Pilgrim, Bourette's experience draws attention to a broader "connection between hunting and sex, specifically heterosexuality which objectifies and feminizes animals and women" (120). In this macho world of the hunting boys' club, Pilgrim describes how these hyper-masculine hunters "slip easily and fluidly between associations of meat and sex" (120). For the hunters, it is "like they're all part of the same course" (Bourette 149).

Sexual violence and meat eating are "intertwined oppressions," as Carol J. Adams writes in her scathing critique of meat consumption (56). Cultural images of sexual violence against women are haunted by images of animal slaughter, and vice versa; these are not "discrete forms of violence" (Adams 54). The image of the "killed and slaughtered animal" becomes a symbol of "male dominance," writes Adams (201). The dead animal symbolises ferocious and aggressive behaviour, territorial protection, hunting and "the vitality and virility of meat eating" (201). Moreover, "[c]arnivorous animals provide a paradigm for male behavior" (201). Such a nonhuman paradigm, however ironically, enforces the human status of the male

hunter and the nonhuman status of his prey, illustrating the alarmingly coterminous flesh of women and nonhuman animals.

In *The Omnivore's Dilemma* (2006), Michael Pollan is ashamed to discover his description of pig hunting descends into “hunter porn” (336). Pollan desires a more ethical position as a meat eater: to consume animals “with the consciousness, ceremony, and respect they deserve” (333). This admirable dream of the ethical omnivore quickly gives way to Pollan’s account of hunting for a pig, which he finds “thrilling” (334). He is exhilarated by the kill: “I’m slightly embarrassed to admit, I felt absolutely terrific” (353). Tracking the pig through a forest, he feels his senses honed by “a hungry attention, reaching out into its surroundings like fingers, like nerves” (334). “Everything is amplified,” he writes: “Even my skin is alert I am the alert man” (335). His recount of hunting is broken by embarrassment: “*Wait a minute*. Did I just write that last paragraph?” (336 emphasis in original). He is shocked by his romanticised depiction of the hunt as a “primordial union” between hunter and prey (336), overcome by the shame of sliding into “the hunter’s ecstatic purple” and “overheated prose ignorant of irony” (337). He hasn’t the stomach for the “barely concealed bloodlust” of “hunter porn” (336). The hunt’s “primordial union” depicts some sort of atavistic copulation or marriage. The “overheated prose” of “the hunter’s ecstatic purple” becomes a phallic sexual narrative that reinforces the gendered binary of man/nature.

Of course, *Under the Skin* inverts this binary of masculine hunter and feminine animal, while continuing to relish the connections between hunting, meat and sex. Like Pollan, Isserley finds hunting thrilling. The narrative depicts abducting hitchhikers as an arousing activity. The “idea of having him” is repeatedly intoxicating to Isserley (18). Her body changes with each abduction, registering “her

excitement” for the hunt (20): “She was covered in sweat now, cold chills running down her back like electric currents. Her heart hammered so hard her breasts shook” (20). She speaks “breathlessly” (46), “panting” (37; 47) and “[m]outh-breathing” (42) with an elevated heart rate (37). After tranquilising her prey, she experiences an intense physical release: “As always at this moment, she saw herself as if from height Then, as always, Isserley fell from her vantage point, a dizzying drop, and plunged back into her body ... and she inhaled shudderingly. Gasping” (21). In a novel that persistently denies her sexual pleasure, the orgasmic release of the hunt stands in for what is no longer available to her surgically altered body. She cannot have sex or masturbate (148), she has “no feeling in her lips” (131) and her breasts are like tumours (250). The “gasping” thrill of the hunt affords her a form of the predator’s sexual pleasure.

The thrill of the hunt runs through the depiction of tracking down escaped livestock at the farm. Four hitchhikers are set loose from their underground cages by Amliss Vess in an act of radical vegetarian politics. Isserley is joined by Esswis to hunt each hitchhiker down. With both a female and male hunter, this description of hunting is less an expression of hunting’s violent gendering than an assertion of the dominance of the “human” over the “animal.” The hitchhikers are “[m]onthlings” (97), “quarter-tonne[s] of stiff flesh” that can hardly walk (98). In a thicket of trees, “[e]yes me[e]t across the forest floor: four large and human, two small and bestial” (99). Isserley cannot help but react as she does in anticipation of abducting a hitchhiker, “breathing hard, panting embarrassingly, her heart slamming in her chest” (99) and later experiencing “a paroxysm of anticipation” (105). Whereas abduction ends her hunt upon the highway, this hunt ends in violent killing. The hitchhiker stands “cowering in the torchlight, naked and sluggish” and “pathetically unfit for the

environment, bleeding from a hundred scratches, pinky-blue with cold” (100). The hitchhiker’s terror is clear. He loses control of his bowels, a “thin stream of blueish-black diarrhoea clatter[s] onto the ground between its legs” (100). He cries out before Esswis shoots him in the forehead, startling “a pair of pheasants” who let fly a “cacophonous chuckling” (100), reminders of a more conventional hunt.

The gore and fear continues. They discover another two hitchhikers hopelessly trying to climb over a barbed-wire fence, as if “engaging in desultory callisthenics against the wire, or ballet warm-ups” with eyes “wild with fear” (102). The hitchhikers begin “waving and ululating loudly” before being shot (102). Isserley and Esswis drag the “carcasses” into their car (102) with “blood leaking copiously” from a “blasted head, whose shattered jaw dangled loose like a glibbery hinge of gore” (103). Hunting to kill is “a spectacularly messier business than either of them had imagined” (103). The last hitchhiker is discovered, ironically, trying to hitch a ride on a nearby road, “straining to erect a blueish thumb on its swollen paw” (106). His initial abduction is repeated, as he gives up his escape and collapses in the back of their car. There is no lasting pleasure to be had from this hunt, the bounty of which lie “[p]ale and glistening with frost” in the farm’s barn “like massive effigies made of candlefat” (114). They are utterly dehumanised by their resemblance to the rendered remains—“candlefat”—of animal bodies.

On the highway, the novel matches Isserley’s hunting with the sexual desires of hitchhikers. She offers up her body to the male gaze, using her body to lure in heterosexual males. She “let[s] him have a good stare” and allows “herself to be examined in earnest.... Did he notice the trouble she had gone to for him? She straightened her back against the seat, pushing her chest out” (11). The focalisation of the narrative shuttles back and forth between Isserley and the hitchhikers. These shifts

in point of view describe small vignettes of aggressive male heterosexuality; indeed, all the hitchhikers are heterosexual. One hitchhiker observes, “Fantastic tits on this one This girl obviously knew she had a couple of ripe ones That’s why this car was heated like an oven, of course: so she could wear a skimpy black top and air her boobs for all to see—for *him* to see” (11 emphasis in original). His observations boil down to one question: “Would he like to fuck her? Probably Just look at this girl’s tits, blazing in the sun” (13). Another hitcher fixates on Isserley’s appearance as an indicator of sexual availability: “Women don’t dress like that ... unless they want a fuck” (34). He plans on taking Isserley somewhere secluded, so “she could suck him off there. He wouldn’t have to see her ugly face then. Her tits would dangle between his legs. He’d give them a bit of a squeeze if she did a good job” (34). He justifies his desire as a “force of nature” legitimised by the “law of the fucking jungle” (35).

These snapshots of male sexuality rely upon the gendering of hunting. The novel openly plays with ideas of predacity and vulnerability, by pitting two competing versions of the predator against each other within the confines of Isserley’s car: the alien and the heterosexual male. Both desire the body of the other in intersecting ways. Isserley’s selection of prey is described in undeniably sexual terms and the hitchhikers’ desire for Isserley is explained as an animalised urge. Isserley’s appraisal of viable livestock lends the representation of sexual predacity a further crudity and material baseness. The predator desires another’s body as something that is nonhuman and devoid of rights or agency, echoing the crude and violent rhetoric surrounding sexual violence as described by Adams: the woman’s body is like a cut of meat to be “consumed” by the heterosexual male appetite.

The depiction of Isserley’s rape complicates this cultural image of the meat-like body of woman. Isserley rarely eats meat but the aroma of spit-roasting steaks

“shimmering in [the oven’s] orange halo” and “sizzling and twinkling in their own juices” proves irresistible (161). As she chews a slice of steak, Amliss Vess asks her to accompany him to the hitchhiker pens. She is terrified of the underground enclosures and “almost choke[s] on her reply; perhaps it was a tiny thread of meat lodged in her throat” (165). Due to her surgery, her body resembles the animal she is eating; she engages in a type of cannibalism, gagging at the revulsion of what she has in her mouth. Not long after this episode she is raped by a hitchhiker. The delicious choking hazard of the “tiny thread of meat” is replaced in her mouth by the man’s “grossly distended” penis (185). “I don’t wanna feel no teeth, understand?” he says with a sickeningly apt selection of words, before forcing Isserley to perform oral sex at knifepoint (185). The rape inverts the binary of sexual predator and sexualised prey, clearly suggesting a parallel between Isserley’s consumption of “a steaming, sizzling morsel” of human steak in the kitchen (163) and the hitchhiker pushing the “urine-flavoured flesh” of his penis into her mouth (185). Meat’s pleasure and violence also recalls the description of Isserley licking a whelk and its suggestion of oral pleasure (as I mentioned previously), which is brutally compromised by the novel’s rape scene. The rape is clearly in no way about pleasure or reproduction; in its orality, Isserley’s rape is about devouring the other and permitting no pleasure or reproductive future. This is transspecies sex—an alarming taboo. The man does not know this but Isserley does; her rape is an act of bestiality but also, strangely, an act of cannibalism.

Rape pushes the transspecies body to a traumatic breaking point. Isserley’s capacity to pass as a human woman is almost shattered by the hitchhiker’s attempt at vaginal rape. Isserley’s genitals are buried beneath scar tissue but she hopes that “the scar lines themselves might resemble the cleft of a vodel’s sex” (186). This sexual

and anthropic recognition is destined to fail, as passing reaches its limit: “I don’t see nothing,” grunts the hitchhiker, searching for Isserley’s vagina (186). “Come closer It’s there. Look,” she says, distracting the hitchhiker with the promise of penetration (186). As he holds her from behind, she flings her arms up and around her body “like two whips” and performs a kind of reverse penetration: “Two fingers of each hand plunged into each of the hitcher’s eyes, right up to the knuckles, right inside his hot clammy skull” (187). She inverts the violence of misogynistic rape and kills the man—or, as Isserley understands it, kills the animal who has attacked her.

The rape scene represents a violent culmination to the novel’s sexualised narrative of hunting. As Brian Luke writes, “In noting the sexuality of hunting we may start understanding what might otherwise be a puzzling phenomenon, namely, the perception of hunting as a dating situation” (638). Hunting rhetoric, writes Pilgrim, “lays the foundation for a belief in the animal’s seduction of the hunter; this come-on, and the violent ending, provides a structural framework for predational relationships” (120). Luke’s argument, according to Pilgrim, describes how “this power and domination over another being, as expressed in hunting, is replicated in sexual behaviors toward other people, such as rape” (121). Thus for *Under the Skin*, Isserley’s “seduction” of and predation upon hitchhikers is violently met by the novel’s rape scene. The novel crystallises how hunting for meat replicates hunting for sex. Confronting the ubiquity of this association, as *Under the Skin* does, means facing up to culture’s blending of binaries: man/woman and human/nonhuman. As Luke puts it, “Rape is hardly a deviant activity [in Western culture], yet to acknowledge this conclusion, just as to acknowledge the normalcy of men’s erotic enjoyment of hunting, suggests the threatening possibility that there is something seriously wrong with normal manhood in this culture” (633).

Isserley is dehumanised by the rape scene, despite her retaliation against the hitchhiker initially reasserting her human dominance over her animal aggressor. She repeatedly exclaims “Ugh! Ugh! Ugh!” in disgust (187). This string of sounds echoes the sound made by the farm’s hitchhikers who have had their tongues removed. In the underground pens, the hitchhikers cry “Ng! Ng! Ng!” (170), expressing their distress at confronting their captors. Similarly, immediately before a hitchhiker is shot during the hunt on the farm, the hitchhiker cries out: “Ng-ng-ng-ng-gh!” (100). A similar narrative alignment of a posthuman figure with animal livestock occurs in Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*, as I write in Chapter Two. The human clone Tommy howls with anger and sadness in a field of mud and animal excrement, expressing his rage in unintelligible noise about being killed for his organs. As another example of the breakdown of language, Isserley’s exclamations of disgust come to unwittingly signal the inexpressible horror of being a person treated like an expendable nonhuman animal, valued only for meat.

Dangerous Beef: Meat, Cannibalism and Anxieties of Consumption

At the “Happy Tums Roadside Diner,” Isserley chooses between three meat-based meals: “Hot Dog, Chicken Roll, and Beef Burger” (288). She opts for the chicken, warily recalling a television programme about the perils of beef: “Beef was dangerous—potentially deadly, even. If it could kill vodsels, she didn’t like to think what it might do to her” (288). The notion of dangerous beef cites the global outbreaks of mad cow disease over the past three decades. Isserley’s squeamishness about the beef burger thus situates the novel within a milieu sensitive to the “potentially deadly” practices of industrial agriculture, especially factory farming. A vein of anxiety runs through Faber’s novel about consumption practices and their

implications for the figure of the human, evoking broader twenty-first-century Western anxieties about damaging human appetites and the capitalist structures that support them. *Under the Skin*'s depiction of farming food animals is a reaction against the human's hunger for meat and the anthropocentrism inherent in such an appetite. Dangerous meat, I argue, is a key contemporary site for imagining the human as a self-destructive species.

The hunting and slaughter of men at Ablach Farm announces a critique of industrial meat farming, as some critics have noted (Aldana Reyes; Dillon, "Question"; Ferguson; Gymnich and Segão Costa; Mitchell, "Preface"; Punter; Vint; Woodward). However, this remains an underexplored area of the novel's secondary scholarship, with almost no consideration of the novel's interest in mad cow disease.

The critique of meat production is also a posthumanist challenge to anthropocentrism. As Woodward writes, Faber's novel disrupts the "ontological commonplaces of who gets to eat whom" (53). Xavier Aldana Reyes describes *Under the Skin* as a "slaughterhouse novel," which banks upon the gory spectacle of killing the objectified body of the other as it is transformed into meat (98). Aldana Reyes is fascinated by depictions of the slaughterhouse because of "the connections they draw between animals and humans, particularly their collapse or indistinction" (101). Like the slaughterhouse, the novel's depiction of the farm reveals an ontological collapse between the human and the nonhuman. The farm is a biopolitical institution which, through its violent control of human life, exposes how ideas of the animal inform structures of dehumanising power in the twenty-first century. This breakdown of species distinctions is matched by the politics of meat consumption. As Woodward writes, "[e]ating animals is, of course, one of the most dramatic ways we differentiate humans from animals" (48). Subsequently, the novel's "meatification of the human"

not only disrupts human privilege (Aldana Reyes 117) but draws attention to the idea of the human's accountability to the nonhuman world, which has renewed political valence in the age of the Anthropocene.

Meat is both wild and farmed in the novel. To Ablach Farm, hitchhikers are essentially wild animals. Their capture and subsequent farming produces “fancy” (256) and “high-quality meat” (255), described authentically as “the real thing” (235). The farm's product is shipped home at a huge expense (234), leading the farm's owner to consider developing more affordable meat derivatives (235) or starting a livestock breeding program (272). Thus the novel is a critique of farming practices as much as it interrogates meat eating. Significantly the novel renders vegetarian politics, as espoused by Amliss Vess, as profoundly flawed. *Under the Skin* is not a clear-cut rejection of meat consumption, but a text thoroughly invested in remaining within the seemingly unresolvable difficulties of what it means for humans to consume nonhuman others.

Faber's novel is a smorgasbord of meat, cooked and raw. The farm serves its workers low quality meat products, “a big breakfast, high in protein and starch. A dish piled high, steaming. Meat pies, sausages, gravy” (156). Isserley is treated to “an almost transparently thin fillet of braised voddissin—a delicacy Nestled in greaseproof paper, it winked at her, still moist and warm, irresistible and disgusting at the same time. She'd eaten it, even licked the juices from the creases in the paper” (91). Meat is a classed consumable, with the choicest cuts “fantastically desirable” and outrageously expensive on the aliens' home planet (234). As a luxury item, meat is used to impress: “to bribe an official, flatter a client” and “seduce a woman” (234). Authentic and top quality meat signifies refined tastes and wealth.

The novel draws attention to what Pilgrim describes as the “animal’s commodified value as meat” (118). Indeed the novel’s term for human food animals, “vodsels,” is a close variation of the Dutch word “voedsels,” which describes food (“Voedsels”). The rich descriptions of cooked meat are matched by descriptions of glossy “stack[s] of scarlet meat under viscose wrapping” (234). A “glistening cargo” of “pinky-red packages” is loaded aboard a transport ship: “A fortune’s worth of raw meat, all neatly parcelled into portions, swathed in transparent viscose, packed into plastic pallets” (157). With flesh behind plastic, the novel cites familiar imagery of the butcher’s shop and supermarket deli: “two trays of meat [were] covered in transparent viscose. One tray was prime steaks, dark auburn and interleaved. The other, larger tray was densely packed with offal: bleached entrails perhaps, or brains. They smelled strong, even through the wrapping” (225). The precision and containment of commodified flesh—packaged, parcelled, portioned and packed—is opposed to the novel’s interest in the disassembled human body, sliced apart by the novel’s posthuman concerns.

Mad cow disease shadows the novel’s exploration of human consumption practices. As well as Isserley’s concern about eating dangerous beef, the disease is explicitly cited as an illogical worry. Isserley instructs a hitchhiker to buckle his seatbelt because she “just can’t afford to be stopped by the police,” to which he scoffs “as if she were admitting to a fear of mice or mad cow disease” (27). This strange reference draws attention to the saliency of mad cow disease in Western culture at the time of the novel’s publication in 2000. Aldana Reyes suggests that the “slaughterhouse in literary fiction is often used as an arena where problems like intensive farming and derived animal diseases may be negotiated” (98). As Shukin observes, the turn of the twenty-first century saw a more successful management of

mad cow disease in the UK but a renewal of disease outbreaks in the US and Canada (230). Amliss Vess describes the “dangers” of eating farmed meat to Isserley (234): “since people have started eating meat, some mysterious new diseases have been reported. There have been unexplained deaths” (233). As with the epidemic of mad cow disease, the novel’s references to infectious meat implicate farming practices, cannibalistic feeding regimes and the biopolitical management of life in the twenty-first century.

Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), more commonly known as mad cow disease, is a condition attributed to what Shukin describes as “animal cannibalism” (226). Outbreaks of BSE in Western countries from the 1980s onwards have been traced to “the practice of feeding the remains of ruminants [animals such as cows and sheep] back to livestock in order to speed animals to market, provoking a material crisis in the protein chains of advanced capitalism” (Shukin 226). The disease represents a biopolitical breaking point; capitalism’s violent extraction of economic value from animal bodies has drastic consequences for both human and nonhuman species. Moreover as Helen Tiffin describes, animal cannibalism means forcing “vegetarian” animals to eat meat (17). As Shukin writes, animal cannibalism represents a “carnal tautology”: the eaten and eating animal is effectively of the same body within the machine of industrialised agriculture (47). BSE is caused by “infectious protein[s]” called “prions,” the byproducts of animal cannibalism’s “protein recycle” (Shukin 228). Shukin explains the disease’s progression: “Prions slowly consume the brains of animals stricken with mad cow disease (and of people stricken with its human variant, Cruetzfeldt-Jakob disease), eating holes in the brain until it is reduced to ‘mere jelly’” (228). BSE “mimics its material conditions”

(Shukin 228). Prions eat through the brains of afflicted animals like a ghastly reflection of the human's industrialised hunger for meat.

Animal cannibalism thus underpins *Under the Skin*'s representation of farming food animals. Through its references to mad cow disease, the novel implicitly suggests that the "standardized feeds" given to hitchhikers are most likely derived from recycled human bodies (135). As I discuss in Chapter Six, Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004) makes such a suggestion explicit as human clones are fed on recycled clone meat. Like fattening ruminant animals, Faber's hitchhikers are kept in Ablach's pens "chewing warily on their unfamiliar new feed" (164) with mouths "stiff" from "overfeeding" (107). Thus meat is dangerous because of its capacity to cause infection across species boundaries, from human to alien. It is precisely at this point that the novel again betrays its interest in mad cow disease and its cannibalistic structure: the novel's central premise is that humans (as aliens) eat humans (as livestock).

The cannibalism of mad cow disease represents a breakdown of the separation between humans and other species. BSE, along with diseases such as AIDS, SARS and avian flu, are "zoonoses, diseases capable of leaping species barriers between animals and humans" (Shukin 205; see also Wolfe, *Before* 51-52). According to Shukin,

A fixation on zoonotic diseases in the last decades of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first suggests that human-animal intimacy is one of the most ideologically and materially contested sites of postmodernity as formerly distinct barriers separating humans and other species begin to imaginatively, and physically, disintegrate. (205)

While observing that the human variant of mad cow has resulted in relatively few human deaths, Tiffin argues that “the challenges [mad cow disease] poses to Western epistemology and ontology—quite apart from national economies—have made it disproportionately significant” (24). In this sense, the novel illustrates what Shukin describes as “the paradox of an anthropocentric order of capitalism whose means and effects can be all too posthuman, that is, one that ideologically grants and invests in a world in which species boundaries can be radically crossed (as well as reinscribed) in the genetic and aesthetic pursuit of new markets” (11). The anthropocentrism of the capitalist industrial meat complex ironically ushers in a posthumanist breakdown of species boundaries. Ablach Farm’s power over “animal” life extends to the management and disruption of “human” life as well, in the sense that the novel recasts humans as livestock and attributes BSE anxieties to a population of alien consumers. Thus as Shukin explains, mad cow disease’s infectious prions do not represent “an indigestible kernel of animal alterity” but rather indicate “a species of stomach trouble symptomatic of the churning insides of biopolitical culture” (229). Mad cow disease, as Faber’s novel well shows, draws attention to the “churning” of the human and other species within the biopolitical context of the twenty-first century.

Cannibalism is already entwined with problematic and racist histories of imperialist exploration, colonisation and the exploitation of non-white populations, as Tiffin explains (16-17). Tiffin describes how mad cow disease inspires panic around cannibalism as a consumption practice already loaded with particular notions of the properly human. She writes, “[c]hallenging our very self definition as ‘civilized humans,’ [mad cow disease] strikes at the foundations of exceptionalism and anthropocentrism, threatening to collapse those ontological and epistemological distinctions between human and animal, savage and civilized, wild and domestic,

cannibal and carnivore” (24). Such an ontological and epistemological collapse is especially significant for *Under the Skin*. The novel is aggressive in its problematisation of the human/nonhuman binary, with mad cow disease offering another avenue for the novel’s posthuman critique. Peter Washer explores the juxtaposition of afflicted humans and animals in representations of the disease in the media. He traces a “fear of becoming like a maddened (rabid) animal” through newspaper reportage of BSE and Cruetzfeldt-Jakob disease (464). He explains how “descriptions of the physical and mental decline of the young people who succumbed to the disease” were persistently associated with images of “uncoordinated and frightened cows, mak[ing] the clear link between the mad cow coverage and the *once human being*” (464 emphasis in original). As Tiffin puts it, “[h]umans and cows, in their suffering, are here no mere analogues: with BSE/nvCJD [Cruetzfeldt-Jakob disease] the one has visibly *become* the other.... [B]efore our very eyes humans ‘turn into’ the cows they have eaten for all to see. Human *as* animal-cannibal is made manifest” (24 emphasis in original).

Under the Skin replicates this ontological pivoting. Underpinned by the novel’s interest in mad cow disease, humans become animal livestock and are forced into the infectious feeding regimes usually imposed upon nonhuman ruminant animals. But hitchhiker livestock are still human, just as the novel demands that its aliens be read as human. This defining tension of the novel means that *Under the Skin* has “humans” eating “humans,” yet again replicating the cannibalistic cycle of mad cow disease.

Eating bad meat leads to bodily decay at Ablach Farm. “[G]ood food” is in short supply as the best meat is reserved for consumers (162). The male farm workers dine on leftover cuts of questionable quality: “blistered fatty sausages and limp

wedges of pie: there was no telling what sort of trash was in them” (256). Isserley refuses this food in favour of bread and the ambiguous “mussanta paste” (256), while the men devour “whatever offal was too gross to be of value to their masters” (257). Their bad diet is compounded by their working conditions, “grubbing in tungsten-lit gloom, breathing stale air” (257). As a result, their bodies crumble and decay: “all these men were falling apart, hair by hair and tooth by tooth” (256). The farm’s management of high quality livestock is offset by the neglect it shows to its workforce. One man has a “mouldy face” and a “mangy, distended belly”; another, a grin of “decayed teeth” (256). A man’s fur coat is like “some dead thing drying out on the side of the A9” with “some sort of disgusting skin ailment that made half his face look like mouldy fruit” (158). Imagery of mouldy fruit undermines the enticing and food-like description of the farm’s fields in winter, which resemble “a rich fruit cake under cream” dotted with “frosted cherries” and concealing “buried sweetness” (52). Beneath Ablach’s wintry “cream” is a place of food and bodies gone bad, rotting out of sight.

As a hunter, Isserley feels sick at the thought of selecting hitchhikers with diseased bodies. One hitchhiker discloses that he has lung cancer: he is “not a healthy specimen” (85). Isserley “imagine[s] someone slicing him open and being squirted in the face by a stream of malodorous, black muck made of burnt cigarette tar and fermented phlegm” (85). This is a “fantasy” of “distaste” (85) suggesting concern about the flavour and quality of meat from an ill body. She feels “squeamish about bringing a vodsel onto the farm which she knew to be diseased”; to do so would go against “her own internal moral sense” (85) and the farm’s “highest standards” of meat production (234). She cannot decide if a cancerous body “made any difference” to the farm’s butchering process (89): “Did [cancer] mean that this vodsel had huge

abnormal lungs crammed into his chest?” (85). She reasons that the lungs “could surely be discarded whatever size they were” (85). She releases him but regrets her choice, retrospectively weighing up his commodified value: “How massive his arms had been!—such massive chumps, bigger than any she’d ever encountered. He would’ve been good for something, surely” (89). Isserley’s regret suggests that the farm will extract whatever value it can from the bodies of livestock, regardless of disease, the farm’s purportedly high standards of meat production or the “moral sense” of its employees.

The farm treats the bodies of its workers like farming machinery. The men are “like over-used pieces of equipment, like tools bought cheap for a job that would outlast them” (256). In this way they resemble the recycled machinery of Ablach, like Isserley’s previous car which is “cannibalized” for parts (36) and the butchering table called “the Cradle” which is built from a “cannibalized” digging machine (210). Isserley’s surgically reconstructed body, too, can be read as a repurposed hunting machine. As Aldana Reyes demonstrates in his study of the slaughterhouse novel, the meat industry has historically relied upon “the disposability” of a cheap, migrant workforce (99). Journalistic accounts of the industry expose “a system that treats workers ‘like animals’”; the system allows an “indistinction between the animal and the human” and an “expendability of the sufferings of both” (Aldana Reyes 99). As Aldana Reyes writes, representations of the slaughterhouse describe a meat industry “oblivious to the struggle of the underclass that manually operate its machinery” (99). As the workers become living machinery in *Under the Skin*, they become part of what Shukin describes as “capital’s closed loops” (228). Haunted by the recycling logic of mad cow disease, the meat industry not only forces cannibalism upon animals but

“cannibalises” itself. Ablach Farm chews through bodies, regardless of species, in the pursuit of capital.

Atomised: Escaping the Posthuman Body

Like the novel’s opening, *Under the Skin* concludes with Isserley behind the wheel of a car in the Scottish Highlands. However, the truncated mobility she exercises in those opening descriptions of hunting is cut short in these final pages. Having abandoned her position at Ablach Farm, she plans on leaving the A9 highway for “the out-of-the-way roads” and “disappear[ing] into the trees like a pheasant” (285). This idea of vanishing into the Scottish landscape like a bird offers Isserley a way of escaping the painful ties of her fraught posthuman body.

Driving towards her “bower by the loch” (289), a man throws himself in front of the car and demands a lift. Isserley reluctantly agrees. He is trying to get to the hospital where his girlfriend is in labour with their first child, the arrival of which he describes as “Immortality”: “That’s whit weans are, y’ken? An endless line of weans throughout history, y’ken? All this life efter death stuff disnae make sense tae me. Dae *you* believe in it?” (291 emphasis in original). The novel’s conclusion offers a revised notion of immortality by envisaging a form of life after death to be found in the nonhuman world. Isserley loses control of the car, which slams into a roadside tree and leaves her pinned to the seat with a broken spine. Her body, which has previously threatened to burst open in an unruly display of posthuman femininity, is prised violently apart by the crash. The steering wheel has “penetrated her breasts,” and she feels “[s]omething warm and gelatinous, trapped inside her top ... slid[e] down her abdomen and into her lap” (293). Her prosthetic breasts escape the confines of her skin, recalling her description of working for Ablach Farm as “[e]ndlessly

putting on these performances, turning herself inside out” (206). The alterity of her prosthetic posthuman body is exposed.

To avoid her body being discovered, Isserley intends to kill herself by detonating the car with concealed explosives. This is framed as a romantic fantasy of transcending the posthuman body by exploding into atoms:

The atoms that had been herself would mingle with the oxygen and nitrogen in the air. Instead of ending up buried in the ground, she would become part of the sky: that was the way to look at it. Her invisible remains would combine, over time, with all the wonders under the sun. When it snowed, she would be part of it, falling softly to earth, rising up again with the snow’s evaporation. When it rained, she would be there in that spectral arch than spanned from firth to ground. She would help wreath the fields in mist, and yet would always be transparent to the stars. She would live forever. (296)

Her blissful anticipation of death makes her own suffering myopic within this grand scale of the nonhuman world. For Isserley, this way of dying would be an extreme rejection of human exceptionalism through the complete disintegration of the body. She imagines moving beyond the human entirely and becoming part of the idyllic nonhuman landscape, where human atoms are indistinct from evaporated moisture, mist, rainbows, rain and snow. Glazer’s film replicates this imagery as well. Isserley sheds her skin to expose her radical posthuman otherness: beneath the appearance of Scarlett Johansson is a black and skeletal human-like body, suggesting a racial dimension to her species difference. She is doused in petrol and set alight by her would-be rapist, with the smoke from her burning body mingling with snowflakes.

In a way, the novel displays a kind of new materialist faith in the “cosmic productivity” of nonhuman matter and its bypassing of anthropocentrism’s bind

(Coole and Frost 20). “Here I come,” are Isserley’s final words in the novel, marking the end of the narrative. However, the novel refuses to decide upon Isserley’s death; the ending is left ambiguous, as Isserley’s injuries may prevent her from reaching the switch that will explode the car. Death and the bodily transcendence it promises to Isserley—a soothing escape from the posthuman body—remains a fantasy.

CHAPTER FOUR

After Human Extinction: Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*

In a Norwegian forest, a collection of books is growing. In 2014, in the Nordmarka wilderness not far from Oslo, a thousand trees were planted. One hundred years from now, they will be cut down to provide paper for the collection's publication in 2114. This is *Future Library* (2014), an artwork by Scottish artist Katie Paterson. Each year from 2014 onwards, a writer will supply *Future Library* with an unpublished manuscript, which will be held in trust in a room (designed by Paterson) in the Deichmanske Public Library, Oslo. The manuscripts will not be read by anyone until 2114. A printing press will also be stored in the library so that one hundred years from now, these unread works of literature will be published on the paper harvested from the forest.

Margaret Atwood was the first writer to contribute to Paterson's artwork, handing over a manuscript titled *Scribbler Moon* in May 2015. For Atwood, *Future Library* confronts a possible future of human extinction and the problems this future poses for text and reading. In an essay accompanying the artwork, she writes, "I am sending a manuscript into time. Will any human beings be waiting there to receive it?" ("Future"). She likens her manuscript to a centuries-old Mexican cave painting of a hand, which communicates a "universal" human meaning over time: "*Greetings. I was here*" ("Future" emphasis in original). Up against humankind's possible extinction, Atwood imagines the library as an affirmation of human subjectivity that survives through writing. David Mitchell, the second author to contribute to *Future Library*, describes the artwork as "a vote of confidence in the future": the library's

“fruition is predicated upon the ongoing existence of Northern Europe, of libraries, of Norwegian spruces, of books and of readers” (“Ayes”).

Extinction animates the artwork. The artwork is productively haunted by the idea that, because of extinction, its narrative and anthropocentric project may be futile. In this respect, *Future Library* is an exemplary artwork of the Anthropocene. As I describe in Chapter One and later in this chapter, the Anthropocene names a new geological age defined by the irreversible impact of humans on the planet and discernible within Earth’s geology. As I write in Chapter Six, the Anthropocene is frequently explained through a story-like thought experiment of human extinction: humans have become so destructive to the planet that in a future after the existence of humankind, a geologist (if one were to survive in such a future) could discover our impact as a species inscribed in Earth’s geological strata. *Future Library* relies upon a similar thought experiment, but for literature. The artwork’s endgame, the publication and reading of the anthology, affirms the presence of the human in an uncertain future—a future of possible human extinction, as Atwood speculates. In Atwood’s eco-dystopian novel *Oryx and Crake* (2003), the protagonist Jimmy believes that art is that which survives when “any civilisation is dust and ashes” (197). The human endures geologically but also artistically, surviving though “[i]mages, words, music. Imaginative structures” (197).

Furthermore Paterson’s artwork will outlast the “extinction” of many of its authors, the majority of whom will be long dead upon publication. For Mitchell, this “cocktail of vanity and humility”—new work from dead authors—is central to the artwork’s allure (“Ayes”). Mitchell calls the artwork an “Ark of Literature” (“Ayes”), but it also exemplifies the melodrama of an anthropocentric literary culture subjected to posthuman pressures. What would literature mean in a world without humans?

What does extinction mean for the novel and its imagining of the human? Atwood takes up questions such as these in *Oryx and Crake*, the opening volume of the *MaddAddam* trilogy, which also includes *The Year of the Flood* (2009) and *MaddAddam* (2013).

This chapter, in particular, reads *Oryx and Crake* as a novel about human extinction and the contradictions involved in extinction's representation. Extinction is impossible to imagine from the perspective of humans because literature routinely refuses to show us a world after the extinction of all humans. *Oryx and Crake* is narrated by Jimmy, who believes he is the last human alive in the wake of a global pandemic. The narrative switches between Jimmy's survival in this post-apocalyptic world and flashbacks to his life before the pandemic in a hyper-capitalist and biopolitical North America. Society is divided between the elitist "Compounds" (31), gated and run by scientific research companies and populated by "the top people" (30), and the dangerous cities called "the pleeblands" (31).

The narrative revolves around Jimmy's troubled friendship with Crake, a scientific wunderkind and misanthrope, and their mutual infatuation with Oryx, an employee of Crake and a former child sex worker. Crake masterminds the pandemic by concealing a virus in the widely distributed "BlyssPluss Pill" (345), marketed as a contraceptive that boosts libido and prolongs life. The pill is secretly designed to irreversibly sterilise its users as a method of population control, reducing human impact on the planet and giving the species "a better chance" at survival (347). However, coupled with the virus, the pill not only ends humankind's reproductive future but pushes it to the brink of extinction via the virus's global "hemorrhagic": "high fever, bleeding from the eyes and skin, convulsions, then breakdown of the inner organs, followed by death" (380). Jimmy survives in "Paradice," Crake's

research laboratory inside the “Rejoov Compound” (350), after Crake forces Jimmy to kill him by slitting Oryx’s throat.

Lonely and deranged, Jimmy renames himself “Snowman” (3) and acts as “pedagogue” and “soothsayer” to another group of survivors (7): the peaceful tribe of genetically engineered and humanoid posthumans called the “Children of Crake” (110) or “Crakers” (365). Designed and created by Crake, the peaceable children are a posthuman replacement for the violent and ecologically destructive human species. Haunted by Oryx and Crake, Jimmy tells the children stories and contemplates how to live as the last human.

Scholarship abounds on Atwood’s oeuvre, from the allegorical richness of *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985) to her Booker Prize-winning *The Blind Assassin* (2000) and her explicit interest in the human’s position in a contemporary world defined by ecological awareness and industries of science and technology.¹ However, scholars have so far neglected a sustained consideration of ideas of extinction in Atwood’s recent fiction. This is curious, as criticism about the *MaddAddam* trilogy has focused on two related themes: the biopolitical exploitation of life in contemporary Western culture (Brooks Bouson, “Game”; Cooke; Hengen, “Moral”; Huggan and Tiffin; McHugh, “Real”; Narkunas; Sheldon) and the ecocritical position of the human in a time of heightened ecological awareness. Boxall argues that “the contemporary

¹ Atwood is sincere in her ecological politics, as demonstrated by the well-documented public debacle over whether or not her novels are science fiction or speculative fiction (see Atwood, *Other*; Le Guin, “Year”). Atwood classes her work as the latter, which she describes as fiction about “things that really could happen” (*Other* 6). Aside from the inherent problems of literary figures classifying their own work in terms of genre (as I write in the introduction and about Faber in Chapter Three), Atwood’s self-classification is interesting precisely because it places her vision of a destructive human future in the realm of the possible.

imagination is haunted by the prospect of planetary death, of irreversible environmental disaster” and identifies Atwood as part of an early twenty-first-century “fin de siècle” moment of fiction at which “the recurrent urge to envisage violent historical change as a kind of universal death has, as its unavoidable corollary, the image of the dying planet” (14; see also Canavan; H. Davis; Johns-Putra, “Care”; Hengen, “Moral” and “Margaret”; Watkins).

Oryx and Crake interrogates biopolitical ideas that accentuate the blending of human and nonhuman identities and bodies. As I discuss in Chapter One, biopolitics names “a form of power over life” that seeks to regulate and manage human populations; however, recent critical work has shown that biopolitics is also militant in its control of nonhuman life (Chrulew 14). While *Oryx and Crake* has attracted multiple biopolitical interpretations, such analyses have generally overlooked the posthumanist questions raised by biopolitics in the early twenty-first century. Sheldon diagnoses the novel with a “full-throttle somatic capitalism,” which she defines as “the intervention into and monetization of life-itself” in order “to amplify or diminish specific bodily capacities.” The novel draws attention to the capitalist exploitations of the object of biopolitics as described by Foucault: “the species body, the body imbued with the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes” pertaining to human populations, ranging from reproduction to health to mortality rates (*History* 139). Departing from this anthropocentric view of biopolitics, Sheldon writes that “the most serious boundary concerns” in Atwood’s novel concentrate upon “the flow of nonhuman bodies—proprietary information, patented life forms, and engineered diseases.” The traditional human parameters of biopolitics fail in this novel, as Graham Huggan and Tiffin write: “*Oryx and Crake* offers a grotesque—simultaneously ridiculous and terrifying—perspective on Haraway’s promissory

cyborg universe in which virtually everything has been crossed with virtually everything else and absolutely everything is for sale” (209). By invoking the cyborg—a totem of early posthumanist thought and an enduring symbol of the posthuman body—Huggan and Tiffin recognise the novel’s “post-natural” thematics, by which everything (human and nonhuman) is already cross-contaminated (209).

The management of bodies is especially pertinent to Atwood’s significance to feminist scholarship. As Madeleine Davies argues, “Atwood’s fictional female bodies become battlefields where anxieties relating to wider power structures are written onto female flesh” (58; see also Brooks Bouson, “We’re” 10; Colebrook, *Sex* 18). For Susan Watkins, gender and sexuality have “an important relationship” with “the way we imagine the end of the world” (119). She therefore traces “a demonstrable attraction to ecological world views” in “contemporary women’s apocalyptic writing” including *Oryx and Crake*, but also novels from Jeanette Winterson, Doris Lessing and Maggie Gee (120). Colebrook reads the *MaddAddam* trilogy in the context of Atwood’s “broader diagnosis of what humanity has always been” in terms of the treatment and control of women (*Sex* 18). Colebrook begins with *The Handmaid’s Tale* as an allegory of humanity’s “passionate commitment to life,” which underpins the moral and bodily subjection of women (18). Turning to the *MaddAddam* trilogy, she argues that here Atwood “presents the hint of a future of *refusal*” of the paternalistic regulation of women and reproductive futures (18 emphasis in original). These novels imagine refusing species survival by conventional means: the “vital order” of a reproductive future is rejected in favour of alternative and mutable forms of feminist kinship and cultural production as the human world falls into decay (18).

Oryx and Crake ties questions of futurity and the reproductive capacity of bodies to ideas of human extinction. However, scholarship on the novel has rarely

considered its representation of extinction and the posthumanist concerns that arise from extinction scenarios. In an exception to this scholarly oversight, Gerry Canavan argues that *Oryx and Crake* refuses to entertain the magnitude and finality of human extinction and instead “open[s] up new space for imagining a post-capitalist future” and “the subsequent emergence of other kinds of lives, after the end of history” (139). For Canavan, the “unexpected utopian potency” of imagining life after the apocalypse is part of culture’s broader ecocritical politics (139). In these terms, Canavan responds to Greg Garrard’s contention that “[o]nly when we imagine that the planet *has* a future ... are we likely to take responsibility for it” (116 emphasis in original). Thus, as Canavan writes, *Oryx and Crake* “imagine[s] a future that is *frightening* (as ecological science tells us it must be) without at the same time being *final* (as it so often seems it will be)—a doomsday, that is, to which we are not simply and inescapably doomed” (155 emphasis in original; see also Bosco 157). Atwood’s future of human extinction is paradoxical because of how it asserts that human extinction is not the end of human stories, as James Berger explains of apocalyptic narratives more broadly: “nearly every apocalyptic text presents the same paradox. The end is never the end” (5). Stephanie S. Turner makes a similar point about extinction itself as the “unimaginable endpoint in the drama of the threatened and endangered; it resists representation because ... we cannot imagine an ending without also imagining what happens after it, that is, the recuperation of the loss” (57-58). Stories of extinction, like *Oryx and Crake*, repeatedly strive to bypass human extinction’s assertion of a properly post-human world. In this sense, fiction’s “thought experiments” of human extinction “have the power to delude and to inspire” (Turner 58), and are as likely to indulge in anthropocentrism as they are to expound a critical politics of the human.

In this chapter, I argue that *Oryx and Crake* is propelled by the idea of human extinction but that, ultimately, Atwood's novel demonstrates the impossibility for literature to imagine the extinction of humankind. By examining the novel's depiction of human extinction, flourishing nonhuman life and non-reproductive futures, I identify *Oryx and Crake* as a significant posthumanist novel for how it places the human under the immense pressures of extinction only to also offer the human an altered form of survival.

Refusing the End of the World: Human Extinction's Impossible Witness

"... he could keep a diary," thinks Jimmy, deciding how to occupy his time as the last human in existence. He romanticises diary writing as a task associated with adventure stories of stormy seas and desert islands; he is a humanities graduate after all. With a diary he "could emulate the captains of ships, in olden times—the ship going down in a storm, the captain in his cabin, doomed but intrepid, filling in the logbook. There were movies like that" (45). He imagines "castaways on desert islands, keeping their journals day by tedious day. Lists of supplies, notations on the weather, small actions performed—the sewing on of a button, the devouring of a clam" (45). Jimmy is also "a castaway of sorts" (45). He lives in a tree by a blisteringly hot beach, and listens to the soothing "wish-wash, wish-wash" of waves (3) while eating a mango (5). Unlike Atwood's enthusiastic participation in the *Future Library* artwork, Jimmy is ultimately deterred from writing because of the certainty of human extinction. The romance of the "doomed but intrepid" writer collapses: "even a castaway assumes a future reader, someone who'll come along later and find his bones and his ledger" (45). Jimmy knows that "he'll have no future reader" (46). He lives in that possible future of human extinction that Atwood speculates upon in her essay about Paterson's

artwork. For Jimmy, extinction has killed all readers and yet he survives. *Oryx and Crake* is propelled by the idea of human extinction and the image of a thoroughly posthuman world, but allows the human to endure. Jimmy lives as the impossible witness to a world after human life.

Images of a posthuman world—literally, a world without humans—proliferate in twenty-first-century culture. The thought of human extinction fascinates as much as it terrifies. Sublime images of the posthuman world ironically demand the attention of the awe-struck human eye, which is necessarily destroyed by the end of the species. This is the central paradox of human extinction. Our extinction is impossible to witness and yet cultural texts, such as *Oryx and Crake*, persistently imagine such a witnessing taking place.

Oryx and Crake revels in the imagery of a relict world without humans. From the beach, Jimmy “scans the horizon” and sees “nothing”: “Everything is so empty. Water, sand, sky, trees, fragments of past time” (13). However, this “empty” world is furnished with the detritus of human life. Journeying from the beach to the Rejoov Compound, Jimmy witnesses a world in decay. There are no humans and the remnants of civilisation slowly crumble and yield to plant life. He walks through “the remains of a drive-in campsite” (193) and “the trashed pleebland boulevards and avenues and roads and streets” (259). Wrecked and burnt-out cars are “piled up in multi-vehicle crashes” alongside “gutted” shops and “small dim apartments above” (259). Abandoned human belongings litter the road outside the gated communities of the Compounds: “A suitcase, a knapsack spilling out clothes and trinkets; an overnight bag, broken open, beside it a forlorn pink toothbrush. A bracelet; a woman’s hair ornament in the shape of a butterfly; a notebook, its pages soaked, the

handwriting illegible” (265). This image of the world after humans is an abandoned world of things, like a stage that the human has only temporarily vacated.

Jimmy imagines how other survivors would see this empty world. He pretends that “he’s not the last of his kind” and “wills” these “others” into existence (260). In particular, he imagines the “descendants” of these survivors “stumbling upon the evidence, the ruins” of human civilisation: “The Taj Mahal, the Louvre, the Pyramids, the Empire State Building” (260). This “ruinous evidence” of the human is not recognised as such by these survivors, instead inspiring curiosity: “*Who made these things? Who lived in them? Who destroyed them?*” (260 emphasis in original). Jimmy imagines the monumental and ruined architecture causing panic and confusion: “you’d be freaked, you’d run away” as if they should not be seen at all (260). These structures defy the human’s “curious monkey brain” and resist being understood as a derelict but meaningful human past (261). Ultimately the structures are dismissed: “Perhaps they’ll say, *These things are not real. They are phantasmagoria. They were made by dreams, and now that no one is dreaming them any longer they are crumbling away*” (261 emphasis in original). The imagined human survivors refuse to witness their monumental and destructive history.

Cultural texts return to the image of the world without humans to register the deeper geological concerns of the Anthropocene. Recent cinema in particular, in films such as *28 Days Later* (2002), *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), *28 Weeks Later* (2007) and *2012* (2009), has been drawn to imagery of a world of human extinction that is nonetheless presented as if to “the vision of no one,” as Colebrook writes (*Death* 28). Colebrook argues that cinematic depictions of “a frozen Sydney opera house, a London where Trafalgar Square is desolate” or “an underwater Manhattan” represent “the human world without humans that is still there *to be seen*” (28

emphasis in original). These familiar images from what Thacker calls “extinction cinema” are thought experiments of human extinction (*Dust* 121). These films, frequently about ecological disaster and viral pandemic, present audiences with images that could never be seen by the human eye. Colebrook argues that such images always fail: “These images cannot be sustained, and are unsustainable; they—like the thought of extinction itself—will always be *for us*, and are always co-opted by the narrative lures they fragment” (28 emphasis in original). Images of the world after human extinction are presented for a human audience, reader or witness; they are always “for us.” The thoroughly posthuman promise of human extinction becomes co-opted by the “narrative lure” of the human.

In diverse texts, genres and cultural fields, representation persistently domesticates human extinction. *Oryx and Crake*’s domestication of human extinction is anticipated by Jimmy and Crake’s obsession with the online game “Extinctathon,” which contracts the vast history of extinct nonhuman species into “an interactive biofreak masterlore game” for teenage boys (92). Extinction is contained by the narrative, initially as a “game” of nonhuman extinctions and later as an “experiment” of human extinction (267). Extinctathon capitalises on what has been called the “extinction of experience,” where the human is deprived of “authentic encounters” with nature (Lorimer 120; see also Miller 431). Extinctathon thus presents nonhuman extinction for human entertainment, as well as an avenue for expressing scientific ingenuity and human dominion over the nonhuman world. Contestants compete by identifying the “Phylum Class Order Family Genus Species” of each extinct “bioform,” with additional points awarded for knowledge of habitat, last live sighting and cause of extinction (92). Crake, whose real name is Glenn, takes his nickname from the game by appropriating the extinct “Red-necked Crake” for his own (93). The

scale of extinction is truncated by the game's parameters, which excludes all species that have not "kakked out within the past fifty years" (92). Savvy contestants familiarise themselves with a readily available "printout of every extinct species," comprising "a couple of hundred pages of fine print ... filled with obscure bugs, weeds, and frogs nobody had ever heard of" (92). As a game, an experiment, a nickname and a printed list, *Oryx and Crake* claims extinction for the human.

In broader critical debates, the tendency to domesticate extinction differs from how human extinction itself has been contextualised by a range of inhuman scales, including climate change (Clark, *Ecocriticism*; Colebrook, "Sexual"; Morton, *Hyperobjects*), solar death (Lyotard) and the disintegration of the universe (Brassier). Immanuel Kant describes extinction as "a representation which outrages the imagination. For then the whole of nature will be rigid and as it were petrified" (227). Ray Brassier's speculative realism pursues "universal annihilation" and "cosmic extinction" to confront the limit of thought itself (228) and to challenge thought's "privilege" as that which outlasts the human (Woodward 99). Brassier is critical of Lyotard's separation of "the future of thought from the fate of the human body" (Brassier 225), which allows Lyotard to think beyond the human and conceive of "the death of all bodies, solar or terrestrial" (Lyotard 14). Lyotard imagines thought's continuation after solar death, whereas Brassier argues that cosmic extinction "turns thinking inside out, objectifying it as a perishable thing in the world like any other" (229). In short, extinction for Brassier is a philosophical extreme and "indexes the [impossible] thought of the absence of thought" (229-30; see also Colebrook, "Extinct"). The death of the human is just one extinction among many at this dizzying cosmological scale.

Nonetheless, novelists have sought to capture the image of extinction at this vast scale. In this respect, H.G. Wells' novel *The Time Machine* (1895) is exemplary. It projects the human imagination, along with Wells's intrepid Time Traveller, into an incomprehensibly distant future marked by the machine's mechanisms: "One dial records days, another thousands of days, another millions of days, and another thousands of millions" (81). The Time Traveller's penetration of this radically inhuman future is enabled by rational humanity's scientific prowess, which is symbolised by the machine's "prodigious velocity" (81). As "a peculiar change crept over the appearance of things," the Time Traveller witnesses a future of species extinctions and planetary death (81). Imagery of light draws attention to the role of the human witness, as if the extinguishing future is illuminated for the human eye. The flicker of "palpitating greyness" charts "the blinking succession of day and night" (81) as a "perpetual," "darkling" (84), "eternal" (85) and "steady twilight brood[s] over the earth" (81). He feels "horror" at the sight of this twilight plunged into "this great darkness" (85), and laments "[a]ll the sounds of man, the bleating of sheep, the cries of birds, the hum of insects, the stir that makes the background of our lives—all that was over" (85). His nostalgic mourning for the human's idyllic past is elicited by his experience of extinction as the "terrible dread of lying helpless in that remote and awful twilight" (85). This posthuman image of extinction is a spectacle for the human and an opportunity to reimagine an idealised relation between the human and nonhuman world. *The Time Machine* is a precursor to the Anthropocene's explanatory story. Both narratives imagine scientists—Wells's Time Traveller and the Anthropocene's geologist—in futures of extinction, surveying the human from afar as idyllic (for Wells) or destructive (for the Anthropocene).

Thus the persistent domestication of human extinction by cultural texts serves to frame extinction as an event for a human witness. Imagining humanity's end becomes another example of human parochialism—anthropocentrism masquerading as posthuman narrative. As Thacker writes, the idea of human extinction has an inbuilt “contradiction” (“Notes” 137) and “paradox” (*Dust* 124). Human extinction not only thrills the human imagination but also destroys it entirely. This philosophical bind gives rise to significant questions for representation: if human extinction negates human thought, then “[w]ho is the witness of extinction? In the case of the extinction of all human beings, who is it that gives testimony to this extinction, to the very thought of extinction?” (“Notes” 144; see also *Dust* 123). For *Oryx and Crake*, Jimmy as the mythologised white man provides this paradoxical testimony. Atwood imagines extinction as a recoverable event for humanity. Colebrook's work on extinction has been a key influence on my analysis of extinction and the posthuman. She argues that “not only have we humanized the emergence of humans from deep time (by regarding evolution as being oriented towards adaptation), but we have also domesticated the sense of the human end. I would refer to this as a reaction formation” (“Introduction”). Extinction becomes a way of denying human culpability for ecological destruction, with “various modes of ‘post-humanism’” reinscribing the human as an entangled part of “a connected, ecological and creative world” (Colebrook, “Introduction”). Human extinction is therefore not only a representation for “us” to behold but a moral narrative of humanity, who witnesses the error of its ways and is thus permitted to survive extinction (see Wolfe and Colebrook).

In this way, the idea of extinction has become essential to the ongoing critique of the human, and posthumanism's theoretical project. Critical theory, asserts Colebrook, “can be considered rigorously only with something like an extinction

hypothesis” (“Extinct” 64). This is especially significant for early twenty-first-century culture, which has been characterised by “a veritable ‘turn to life’” in scholarly debates in the humanities (Hunt and Youngblood 8). An extinction hypothesis asks scholarship to think beyond this “culture of life,” understood as “the broad, and hence usually barely perceptible, tendency within contemporary mainstream Western culture to subject personal and social questions to figures of life” (Hunt and Youngblood 6). In this sense, extinction challenges the work of theory itself: “How would theory confront the absence of *theoria*: ‘life’ without the human look? Life without praxis, life without meaningful action, life without production or labour: such would be theory *after* theory, or theory that opened itself to the thought of extinction” (Colebrook, *Death* 38 emphasis in original). Clark asks a similar question of literary studies: “How then to write literary criticism in a time of acknowledged mass extinction without just seeming absurd?” (*Ecocriticism* 48). Following Colebrook and Clark, theory and criticism must open themselves to being both posthuman and posthumanist by untethering thought from the strictures of anthropocentrism. Furthermore, posthuman fictions of extinction have been more open to this “genuinely post-theoretical meditation” than theory itself (Colebrook, *Death* 40). Given extinction’s salience in the early twenty-first century, Colebrook argues that theory must address culture’s “domination” by “a constant, obsessive and fraught imagination of a life or non-life beyond the gaze of the organism, and by the literal image of extinction” (*Death* 40). In DeLillo’s novel *Point Omega* (2010), the ageing scholar Richard Elster is captivated by “the dream of extinction” (45). DeLillo describes the human’s propensity to narrativise extinction: “We keep inventing folk tales of the end. Animal diseases, transmittable cancers” as well as “[t]he climate,” “[t]he asteroid, the meteorite” and “[f]amine, worldwide” (64). Extinction’s allure, in

Point Omega, is the offer of an entirely other form of existence and witness: “We want to be stones in a field” (67). But even this stony dream fails in its confrontation of an extinction hypothesis. The dream of an inhuman witness to extinction, symbolised by the stones, is hemmed in by the field’s borders—a fence line of human activity and a human frame of reference.

It is not surprising that *Oryx and Crake* frames its pandemic like a screen media event. Extinction is tied to a visual culture that caters to the human eye. From the safety of the Paradise laboratory, Jimmy watches the pandemic wipe out the human species “like a movie” (399): “the end of a species was taking place before his very eyes” (401). Internet and television coverage presents the worldwide destruction, with reporters who are “thoroughly into it, filming the action from traffic helicopters, exclaiming as if at a football match: *Did you see that? Unbelievable! Brad, nobody can quite believe it. ... Now, back to the studio*” (397 emphasis in original). Documentary films zone in on “images of the virus” itself, “the usual melting gumdrop with spines,” and provide “commentary on its methods” (397-98). An online map displays surviving human communities with “lit-up points” and Jimmy watches “with fascination” as these lights “blinked out” like eyes closing (399). As the internet crashes and television channels go dead, news anchors “set the cameras to film their own deaths” with gratuitous visual detail (401). The pandemic as extinction event is thoroughly “theatrical” (401). It is presented for an audience—for Jimmy—and thus privileges human sight and the survival of the human eye. When the pandemic has run its course and “there [is] nothing more to watch,” Jimmy switches to “old movies” (402). For Jimmy, extinction is part of the same visual culture as Humphrey Bogart, Alfred Hitchcock’s *The Birds* (1963) and George Romero’s *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) (402).

Witnessing the world after human extinction is depicted with a kind of terrible power. Jimmy faces “a present that will destroy him if he looks at it too clearly” (173) as if understanding that the sight of the world after human extinction must necessarily be an image for no one. As he wakes in his tree, the narrative describes his reluctance to gaze at the world around him. He “opens his eyes, shuts them, opens them, keeps them open” as if forcing himself to observe his present situation (173). Contemplating the future causes “[s]heer vertigo” (173). As Stark argues in relation to McCarthy’s *The Road* (2006), environmental anxiety is registered at a “symbolic and allegorical level through the metaphoric place of vision, sight, and blindness” (72). As an extinction narrative and example of climate fiction, McCarthy’s novel confronts the human’s “preparedness to see” climate change as anthropogenic (72). As Stark writes, *The Road*’s privileging of the human as “the chosen witness to the end of days” (80) is compounded by the ethical “imperative” to see clearly the destructive inhumanity of the human species (79). In Atwood’s novel, Jimmy’s troubled vision—his inability to “look” at the present “too clearly”—signals a crisis in the human that is difficult to behold. Jimmy is a reluctant witness to extinction and his capacity to observe the aftermath of humanity is blinkered.

Vision is integral to the figure of the human, as Wolfe writes: “the visual” holds an “indexical relation to the human, to reason, and to the representational mastery of space itself” (*Posthumanism* 133-34; see also *Animal* 3). Vision, Wolfe explains, allows the human to organise and control its nonhuman environment, as I discuss in Chapter One and in relation to Winterson’s *The Stone Gods* and Mitchell’s *Cloud Atlas* in Chapters Five and Six. “[V]isual prowess” is a humanist attribute that shores up the anthropocentric distinction between human subject and nonhuman object (Wolfe, *Posthumanism* 130; 133). After human extinction, no such humanist

organisation of the nonhuman world can take place. Human extinction antagonises Jimmy's human eye with the destruction of the subject/object sorting operation and with it, the end of the human's dominion over the nonhuman. As the human becomes extinct, it joins "the long, long list" of extinct nonhuman species: "*Homo sapiens sapiens*, joining the polar bear, the beluga whale, the onager, the burrowing owl" (401 emphasis in original). Human extinction depicts the anthropocentric trauma of the human's transformation from subject to object, from the rational scientist who records the list of dead species to the last entry on that same list.

The association of vision with the human is continued by the representation of other kinds of observation. As teenagers, Jimmy and Crake immerse themselves in a violent online visual culture. They watch "animal snuff sites" characterised by "repetitious" cruelty: "one stomped frog, one cat being torn apart by hand, was much like another" (93-94). They enjoy viewing "nitee-nite.com," an "assisted suicide site" with a "this-was-your-life component" (95). "[H]edsoff.com" screens "live coverage" of people "topped with swords" in China, while "alibooboo.com" shows people "having their hands cut off and adulterers and lipstick-wearers being stoned to death by howling crowds" in the Middle East (94). "Shortcircuit.com, brainfrizz.com, and deathrowlive.com" cover "the best" live "electrocutions and lethal injections" in America, with the condemned "hamming it up" for their devoted audience (95).

Jimmy and Crake are also consumers of pornography's "underwater ballet of flesh and blood under duress" (99). They first see Oryx performing on one of many "sex-kiddie sites" (103) called "HottTotts," which is billed as "global sex-trotting" and screens footage of sexually abused non-Western children (102). Jimmy and Crake are transfixed by scenes of "the standard gargantuan Gulliver-in-Lilliput male torso—a life-sized man shipwrecked on an island of delicious midgets" (103). The boys

represent a masculinised and morally bankrupt viewership that enjoys the subjugation of less-than-human lives, including nonhuman animals, the suicidal, non-white children and adults, women, and criminals put to death. This subjugation represents the disintegration of human community long before human extinction: Atwood's "nightmare dystopia" of an "inhuman future whereby we have sacrificed our humanity to rapacity and venality has already arrived, and that is because that is how *man* has always lived" (Colebrook, *Sex* 18 emphasis in original). Undeniably, an important empathetic sense of the human is already extinct in the novel well before the extinction of the human as species. Luciano and Chen describe this "affective" inflection of the human as "the often-feminized subject of sympathy": "to be 'human,' in this sense, is to feel for others, to love and to grieve and to respond to the suffering of others" (190). This version of the humanist subject, "aligned with the ideal of humaneness" (Luciano and Chen 190), is destroyed by *Oryx and Crake*'s cruelly posthumanist visual culture.

Extinction narratives such as *Oryx and Crake* thus draw attention to the contours of the human in the present through asking: who is permitted to witness the end of the human? *Oryx and Crake*, as with all Atwood's writing, is highly self-conscious of its thematic and political work. As such, this novel asks the reader to understand human extinction through the eyes of Jimmy: a white, able-bodied, upper-class heterosexual man. After the pandemic, Jimmy renames himself "Snowman" (3), which emphasises his status as a white everyman but also suggests that this version of the human will inevitably melt and fade away. However, the novel lends whiteness a pervasiveness and perseverance, and gestures to the human's problematic racial history (see Chen 31-35). Jimmy chooses the "dubious label" of Snowman (8) in an effort to "exist only in the present, without guilt, without expectation" (407) and yet

as Roger Davis argues, this difficult moniker “risks further colonisation of a variety of discursive arenas” (238). Jimmy’s “unexamined and largely unspoken whiteness” (Davis 238) is compounded by the genre expectations established by the novel’s evocation of colonial adventure and castaway stories. Jimmy rants from a guidebook written for “European colonials running plantations” which advises white men to “refrain from raping the natives” (5). As Stark writes in relation to McCarthy’s *The Road*, “[w]hen the human holds the privileged place of witness to the end of the world in the cultural imaginary, we need to be cognizant of the particularity of this version of the human” (81). As with the surviving male protagonists of McCarthy’s novel, Jimmy represents “the persistence of the ideology of liberal humanism” (Stark 81). Extinction narratives are often racialised accounts of masculine human endurance, blinded by the tenacity of white masculinity.

The novel mythologises a white, masculine version of the human. More than a wintry icon of child’s play, “Snowman” is truncated from the “Abominable Snowman—existing and not existing, flickering at the edges of blizzards, apeline man or manlike ape, stealthy, elusive, known only through rumours” (8). Jimmy endows himself with a white masculinity of mythic and monstrous proportions: “elusive, white, a rumour” (431). This masculine heroism is contrasted to the novel’s problematic depiction of women as either absent mothers, child porn stars or interchangeable girlfriends. The novel’s mythology of man is also a fantasy of the human’s self-erasure: “Maybe that’s the real him, the last *Homo sapiens*—a white illusion of a man, here today, gone tomorrow, so easily shoved over, left to melt in the sun, getting thinner and thinner until he liquefies and trickles away altogether” (263 emphasis in original). Believing himself to be the pandemic’s only survivor, Jimmy represents man and the human in their surviving entirety. The space between the

signing self and referent (man or the human) is drastically shortened, almost merging together. Extinction has a propensity to obliterate difference. In Jimmy's case, extinction truncates the concept of the human so that it equates to a lone, white, able-bodied, upper-class heterosexual man, a figure forced to endure.

As a critique of the anthropocentrism of extinction narratives, Atwood's novel draws attention to the problems of representing extinction more broadly. Who is permitted to survive and organise knowledge in a world without humans? How and under what conditions does the possibility of extinction warrant attention from literature, art and theory? Modern humanity exists in a time of extinction and species fragility, as numerous critics have described (Chrulew; Clark; Colebrook; Kolbert; Lorimer; Thacker; van Dooren; Wolfe). However given the established interest in the extinctions of countless nonhuman species from science and conservationism, when does extinction gain traction in the humanities and cultural texts? At a time when extinction is increasingly part of the zeitgeist, novels like *Oryx and Crake* imagine how normative man continues to legitimate his position in a posthuman world that is putatively antagonistic to his very survival. The idea of the world after humans is clearly not posthuman enough.

Oryx and Crake's failure to depict a world after human extinction is affirmed by the final chapter. Jimmy discovers "a human footprint, in the sand" that he reads as "a signature of a kind," with the novel again drawing attention to its refusal of human extinction (431). Other humans have survived the pandemic, making clear the sense of the posthuman at work in *Oryx and Crake*: the posthuman, figured as the image of a world after humanity, does not describe a definitive break from the human. Instead, the novel's depiction of a posthuman world describes the figure of the human under duress and pressed upon by extinction's slow burn: the "drawn-out and ongoing

process of loss: the ‘dull edge of extinction’” (van Dooren 46 emphasis in original).

With the light still dim, Jimmy peers through the trees at a group of three people “sitting around their fire” (431). Fire announces humanity’s survival, but does not reveal to Jimmy if these other human survivors are friendly or dangerous. Jimmy spies “the smoke ... rising in a thin column” (430) which draws him to a forest clearing where these other humans are cooking “roast meat” (432). The fire’s significance lies in its anthropological and symbolic associations with the human’s evolution as “a species touched by fire” (Pyne 24) and “the ape of fire” (Clark, *Ecocriticism* 61). As Anne Harris puts it, “it is fire that allowed *homo erectus* to sleep safely at night on the ground; it is fire that cooked the food that nourished and developed our outrageous brains; and it is fire that made us human” (47 emphasis in original). If fire marks the human’s evolutionary emergence and survival, fire fittingly accompanies the human’s refusal of extinction in *Oryx and Crake*. Fire illuminates the novel’s final scene and allows Jimmy to glimpse, through “watering” eyes, the human’s ongoing story of endurance over extinction (432).

Flourish and Thrive: Nonhuman Life After Human Extinction

Nonhuman life thrives after the pandemic in *Oryx and Crake*. Aside from the posthuman Children of Crake, Atwood’s narrative world is populated by an abundance of bird, insect, mammal and plant species. The coastline echoes with the “shrieks of birds” (3) and the forest sounds with the “rasp and trill” of insects (109). Jimmy watches flocks of birds “with resentment: everything is fine with them, not a care in the world” (174), as if to emphasise the nonhuman world’s obliviousness to human extinction. Jimmy’s body is riddled with “bug bites” (3); his body is “attacked by ants” (42) and “attractive to beetles. Beetles, flies, bees, as if he’s dead meat” (44).

He is wary of the “scales and tales” of predatory “wildlife” (4). Dangerous nonhuman animal hybrids “lie in wait” by “[w]atering holes,” ready to “pounce” (48). Human extinction does not coincide with the end of the world in this novel, but rather announces what Canavan calls a renewed “sense of futurity” and a “reopening of possibility: the assertion of the radical break, the strident insistence that things might yet be otherwise—however that might happen, and whatever else we [humans] might become along the way” (156). While humans are all but eliminated, the pandemic leads to a nonhuman flourishing—a derelict world inhabited by a menagerie of creatures and fecund plant life.

In this way, *Oryx and Crake* invites readings that separate the human from the nonhuman. Nonhuman thriving is construed as the vibrant flipside to human destructiveness and extinction. The scholarship about *Oryx and Crake* has therefore been repeatedly drawn to ecocriticism, broadly conceived as “the study of the relationship of the human and the non-human, throughout human cultural history and entailing critical analysis of the term ‘human’ itself” (Garrard 5). Lawrence Buell emphasises the central role of the cultural imaginary in ecocriticism: confronting environmental problems “involves a crisis of the imagination the amelioration of which depends on finding better ways of imaging nature and humanity’s relation to it” (2). Ecocritical thought thus relies upon culture’s “imaging” of the human/nonhuman binary in order to recover humanity’s “misrecognition of the ecological relationship which ties humans to their natural environment” (Bergthaller 731). This “foundational” tenet of ecocriticism has been criticised for its utopian view of culture’s capacity to rectify environmental problems (Bergthaller 730). Clark is sceptical of the idea that changes to “material modes of production, food habits, energy use, reproductive trends and so on” can be achieved through “the

interpretation of cultural artefacts” (*Ecocriticism* 19). Clark’s concern is especially relevant in terms of the Anthropocene’s deep and irreversible inscription of the human’s damage to the planet. But significantly, ecological disasters are more than environmental or geological events; they also become cultural moments. To this end, what *Oryx and Crake* and other posthuman fictions do differently is reveal how the human and nonhuman are not discrete categories. In this way, fiction seeks to change attitudes to structures of human privilege and ideas of the future organised around normative human identity.

Understandably, most criticism about *Oryx and Crake* has focused on how the novel illustrates the human’s generally destructive relationship with the easily exploitable nonhuman world. This reading of the novel, which the novel clearly invites, risks falling back upon a clear distinction between the human and nonhuman. Sheldon notes the “critical consensus” in the scholarship that “*Oryx and Crake* privileges environmental innocence” against what Shannon Hengen calls the “godlike power of science” (“Moral” 140). Adeline Johns-Putra identifies *Oryx and Crake* as part of a swathe of recent fiction about anthropogenic climate change (“Climate” 268; see also Milner, Burgmann, Davidson and Cousin 8; Trexler 17; Trexler and Johns-Putra 188) where “humanity’s collective hubris” implies that “we simply have not cared enough, and that the way forward lies in caring more” for the environment (Johns-Putra, “Care” 128). However, ecocritical readings of Atwood too often return to what Hannes Bergthaller calls “normative conceptions of nature” as a pure and pristine nonhuman entity, which are untenable in the early twenty-first century (729). *Oryx and Crake* overturns criticism’s tendency to relegate “the nonhuman environment in literary works” to mere “setting,” a term that “deprecates what it denotes, implying that the physical [and nonhuman] environment serves for artistic

purposes merely as backdrop, ancillary to the main event” (Buell 85). As fiction, critical posthumanism, Anthropocene discourse and the nonhuman turn have shown, the human and the nonhuman are not and have never been discrete categories of difference. As *Oryx and Crake* repeatedly demonstrates, the novel’s thriving animal and plant life cannot be thought of as exclusively nonhuman. *Oryx and Crake* represents a posthumanist entangling of the human and the nonhuman, thereby permitting a posthuman continuation of the human beyond the body and after extinction.

This prospering of life is central to how *Oryx and Crake* differs from other recent extinction narratives. Atwood’s novel does not make human extinction synonymous with the end of the world. *Oryx and Crake* imagines extinction just for humans while other life continues, whereas other texts depict extinction as something from which there can be no recovery for the planet or any species, human or nonhuman. Films such as Lars von Triers’ *Melancholia* (2011) or Zak Hilditch’s *These Final Hours* (2013) represent extinction as a totalising and world-ending event. Von Triers’ elegiac family melodrama and Hilditch’s hedonistic party film conclude with the sublime event of human extinction via planetary destruction, as Earth collides with a giant planet in *Melancholia* and a meteorite in *These Final Hours*. Human extinction determines narrative form, with the extinguishing of the human not only coinciding with planetary annihilation but also marking the narrative closure of these films. Similarly, McCarthy’s novel *The Road* describes how “the end of the human is also the end of the world” (Stark 80). As Stark identifies, the boy becomes extremely sick and the man prepares to kill himself so that neither will die alone. He says to himself, “You have to be quick. So you can be with him. Last day of the

earth” (267). Imagined at a planetary scale, the death of the human destroys the planet and the possibility of nonhuman life.

As a familiar trope of popular dystopian texts, bird and plant species thrive in the wake of the human in *Oryx and Crake*. Birds nest and plants grow in decaying human spaces. At sunrise on the coastline, a “long scrawl of birds unwinds from the empty towers—gulls, egrets, herons, heading off to fish along the shore” (174). These “offshore towers” are “overflowing with birds” (412). At sunset, “[h]undreds of birds are streaming across the sky”: flocks of ibises, herons and cormorants fly “roostward bound” for “roof gardens” that are “top-heavy with overgrown shrubbery” (109). This abundant “darkening foliage” is noisy with the “croaking and squabbling” of birds (109). In urban spaces, “the botany is thrusting itself through every crack” and a “kind of vine is growing everywhere, draping the windowsills, climbing in through the broken windows and up the bars and grillwork” (260). A street is “choked with vines,” which have “festooned themselves across the street, from roof to roof” (262). This entangling of human space and nonhuman life is one of constant and rapid growth: “Given time it will fissure the asphalt, topple the walls, push aside the roofs. ... Soon this district will be a thick tangle of vegetation” (260). The activity of plants does not describe a pure nature, but an agential form of life that interacts with human structures; this vegetation thrusts, climbs, chokes, fissures, topples and pushes against the abandoned human world. A “minnow city” forms in a “salt marsh” taking over a “landfill dotted with semi-flooded townhouses” (174). These residential human spaces are reinscribed as a kind of nonhuman urbanisation—a “minnow city”—populated by fish and the birds that hunt them.

The human and the nonhuman are not separate in this landscape but are entwined, thus breaking down the notion of a discrete human ontology. Cohen’s

theorisation of the inhuman is helpful here, which describes how human and nonhuman materialities are simultaneously different and intimate. The human and the nonhuman exist in a relation of “catastrophe” and “companionship” (Cohen, *Stone* 10). This relation is also reflected in how the novel depicts ecological destruction. *Oryx and Crake* overtly manipulates scales of time to depict a world in ruin and, through the novel’s use of flashbacks, to witness the human before and after an extinction event. In this way, the scale of ecological catastrophe is condensed into short passages of narrative for a reader: “the coastal aquifers turned salty and the northern permafrost melted and the vast tundra bubbled with methane, and the drought in the midcontinental plains regions went on and on, and the Asian steppes turned to sand dunes” (27). This condensing of catastrophe is reflected in human civilisation’s “endless crumbling”: the scale of “the endless labour, the digging, the hammering, the carving, the lifting, the drilling, day by day, year by year, century by century” is reduced to “[s]andcastles in the wind” (50). The scaling of catastrophe in Atwood’s novel evokes what Clark describes as “a confrontation with the entrapment of human actions and decisions within a disastrous impersonal dynamic they do not comprehend” brought about by the vast scales of ecological crisis, climate change and the Anthropocene (*Ecocriticism* 109). The world in decay happens in fast-forward in *Oryx and Crake*: the whole state of Texas “dried up and blew away” (287) and Harvard “got drowned” (203). These representations contribute to a sense throughout *Oryx and Crake* that nonhuman time scales are failing. Time becomes “a bankrupt idea” (44). Jimmy’s watch, although broken, tells the time as “zero hour” as if to symbolically erase and reset human history after the apocalypse (3; see also 433). News sources are inundated with endless lists of “more plagues, more famines, more floods, more insect or microbe or small-mammal outbreaks, more droughts” (298).

The novel's litany of environmental disasters brings the human and nonhuman worlds into intimate companionship.

The thematic concern with the entangling of the human and the nonhuman intensifies with the depiction of pigoons, a genetically modified pig species. Developed by scientists at the "OrganInc Farms" Compound, the "*sus multiorganifer*" or pigoon is used "to grow an assortment of foolproof human-tissue organs in a transgenic knockout pig host" (25 emphasis in original). Pigoon bodies are engineered for the rapid growth of "kidneys and livers and hearts" (25) and are "much bigger and fatter" than regular pigs (29): some pigoons "could grow five or six extra kidneys at a time" (26). The excess organs are "reaped" for human transplant when needed and without killing the animal (26), in a similar fashion to the organs donated by less-than-human students in Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005). OrganInc stresses that no "defunct pigoons ended up as bacon and sausages" because "no one would want to eat an animal whose cells might be identical with at least some of their own" (27). However as ecological catastrophes increase and meat is harder to source, the staff café at OrganInc, nicknamed "Grunts," continues to serve "back bacon and ham sandwiches and pork pies" (27). The pigoons resonate with the cannibalistic use of bodies as material for food and industry in Faber's *Under the Skin* (2000) and Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004).

After the pandemic, the pigoons are "feral" (43) and "clever" predators (276). They are "brainy and omnivorous" hunters and disrupt the human's traditional privileging by the binaries of hunter/animal, predator/prey, human/nonhuman: "They'd bowl him over," thinks Jimmy to himself, "trample him, then rip him open, munch up the organs first. He knows their tastes" (276). His familiarity with their "tastes" can be understood by the transspecies status of the pigoons, whose bodies

contain human material: “some of them may even have human neocortex tissue growing in their crafty, wicked heads” (276). As well as human/pig hybridity, *Oryx and Crake* repeatedly illustrates its interest in hybrid forms through its playful language and invented species. Portmanteau words and marketing terms such as “BlyssPluss,” “ChickieNobs” (7), “OrganInc” (25), “Happicuppa” (209) and “AnooYoo” (288) mimic the novel’s splicing of nonhuman animals, including the snake/rat “snat” (57), the rat/skunk “rakunk” (58), the wolf/dog “wolvog” (125) and rabbits that glow with the genetic material of jellyfish (109). As the novel’s most prominent hybrid, the thriving pigoon population suggests a persistence of the human after extinction. This version of human survival is an affirmation of the human as a techno-scientific and domineering species but also a posthuman disruption to the human’s ontological and bodily purity. The melding of human and pig bodies describes a kind of intimacy between species and an enfolding of human and porcine flesh.

The dangers of cross-species entangling are explicitly cited by Jimmy’s “earliest complete memory” of a “huge bonfire” (17). The child Jimmy watches a bonfire of carcasses in a wet field: an “enormous pile of cows and sheep and pigs” with “legs stuck out stiff and straight” (18). The burning animal bodies are “like steaks and sausages, only they still [have] their skins on” (20). This description of the bonfire is a clear reference to the familiar media imagery of destroyed food animals following outbreaks of diseases such as avian flu and mad cow disease, which I discuss in relation to *Under the Skin* in Chapter Three. Like Faber’s novel, Atwood’s text presents a strident comment upon industrialised agriculture and human consumption practices. Like the organ-growing pigoons, “ChickieNobs” produce meat quickly from radically altered chicken bodies, which are like “animal-protein

tuber[s]” (238): “large bulblike object[s] ... covered with stippled whitish-yellow skin” (237). Human consumption is shown here to be monstrous and unhampered by ethical qualms for animal cruelty, in a manner not dissimilar to the feeding practice of enforced animal cannibalism that causes mad cow disease, to which *Oryx and Crake* alludes through the description of humans eating human matter in the bodies of pigeons (27). As Chapter Three of this thesis shows, diseases like mad cow disease are zoonotic and posthumanist in that they cross species boundaries with infection and change human bodies. Aside from the havoc of the pandemic itself, *Oryx and Crake* signposts the threat of disease to human bodily integrity early in the narrative: “a disease got into you and changed things inside you. It rearranged you, cell by cell” (23). Thus Jimmy’s memory of burning animals signifies a breakdown of the human/nonhuman distinction.

Undeniably, the novel’s entangling of the human and nonhuman is posthumanist because it breaks down the human’s normative intensity. Moreover this entangling also undermines traditional notions of nature as purely nonhuman. The human can no longer regard the nonhuman from a safe distance, as the Anthropocene has drawn attention to. The term “anthropocene” was originally coined by atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen and biologist Eugene Stoermer “to emphasize the central role of mankind in geology and ecology” (17) and has come to propose a new age of the planet: a “human-dominated, geological epoch” (Crutzen 23). While the Anthropocene is yet to be officially adopted as a new geological period (although recent research suggests this is likely to happen soon: see Lewis and Maslin; Waters et al.), Clark describes how the humanities have taken up the Anthropocene with gusto and “in a sense beyond the strictly geological” (*Ecocriticism* 2; see for example J. Cohen and Duckert; T. Cohen, Colebrook and Hillis Miller; Colebrook, *Death*;

Haraway, *Staying*). The term has become indispensable to the nonhuman turn, critical posthumanism and work on extinction because of how the Anthropocene applies pressure to the human and registers a “profound change in the human condition” (Chakrabarty, “Postcolonial” 15), as I write in Chapter One and expand upon in Chapter Six. The Anthropocene announces what Morton describes as “the daunting, indeed horrifying, coincidence of human history and terrestrial geology” (*Hyperobjects* 9). As Chakrabarty writes, the Anthropocene destroys “the artificial but time-honored distinction between natural and human histories” to such an extent that “[h]umans now wield a geological force” (“Climate of History” 206). The human has therefore become like “some nonhuman, nonliving agency” (Chakrabarty, “Postcolonial” 11) and this nonhuman-ness of the human is now “one of the modes of our collective existence” as a species (12). As Morton puts it, humans have “entered a new phase of history in which nonhumans are no longer excluded or merely decorative features of ... social, psychic, and philosophical space” (*Hyperobjects* 22). However this “new phase” of paying attention to the nonhuman becomes unavoidably anthropocentric in the context of the Anthropocene. In this new geological age, the signature of the human is geologically inscribed in the nonhuman rocks of the planet. Reading the nonhuman in the earth’s geological strata thus becomes another way of reading the human.

The depiction of art in *Oryx and Crake* indexes how the Anthropocene works as a cultural moment as well as a geological epoch. The Texan bio-artist Amanda Payne, one of Jimmy’s girlfriends before the pandemic, makes large-scale artworks of words out of decaying matter. Amanda drives “a truckload of large dead-animal parts to vacant fields or the parking lots of abandoned factories and arrange[s] them in the shape of words” (287) like “PAIN,” “WHOM,” “GUTS” (288) and “LOVE” (290).

She waits for vultures to descend upon the words, “tearing them apart,” while she photographs the “vulturized” words from a helicopter (287). These “Vulture Sculptures” represent human language’s failure and endurance in the time of the Anthropocene (287). Amanda constructs words from the nonhuman—dead animals, live vultures—and then records the nonhuman’s destruction of language. The sculptures harness the “powerful process” of the human’s inscription in, and erasure by, the nonhuman world: “Vulturizing brought [the words] to life ... and then it killed them” (287). Colebrook argues that Amanda’s art “embraces disappearance” as a feminist refusal of masculinised humanity’s imperative to survive, whatever the cost (*Sex* 21). After the pandemic, Jimmy worries about the “dissolution of meaning” and “his cherished wordlists drifting off into space” (43). As Clark puts it, reading in the Anthropocene “becomes also a measure of the irreversible break in consciousness and understanding, an emergent unreadability” (*Ecocriticism* 62). Amanda’s sculptures are “not tied to self-maintenance” (Colebrook, “Counter” 13) but rather subvert “the sanctity of the word” (*Sex* 21) through the “contingent and transitory matter” of living and dead nonhuman bodies arranged across the earth (“Counter” 13).² The nonhuman is shaped into human meaning, which is then devoured by the nonhuman vultures, a species symbolically associated with the “space of loss, death, and extinction” (van Dooren 46). This feminist and posthumanist artistic practice refuses futurity; these artworks are made to be consumed and to confront a destructive future of

² Colebrook’s textual analysis focuses exclusively on *Oryx and Crake*’s sequel, *The Year of the Flood*, which contains further detail of Amanda’s art. In that novel, Amanda makes the word sculptures out of “fish guts and toxic-spill-killed birds and toilets from building demolition sites filled with used cooking oil and set on fire” (57), as well as “cow bones” doused in “pancake syrup” and eaten by insects (56). See Colebrook (“Counter” 13-15; *Sex* 20-22).

nonexistence. The “vulturized” sculptures invite their audience to witness the bedrock of humanist culture—words, language, art, meaning—in decay.

Beyond a Reproductive Future: Human Extinction and the Sexual Crisis of Man

“Where’s my Bride of Frankenstein?” whimpers Jimmy: “Why am I on this earth? How come I’m alone?” (199). *Oryx and Crake* depicts a non-reproductive future for the human. For Jimmy, there can be no future of reproduction and no future of sexual pleasure organised around the heterosexual couple. As a figure of the posthuman, extinction is thus framed by Atwood’s novel as a sexual crisis for man, understood as the masculine, heterosexual and white human subject of liberal humanism. Through the representation of Oryx’s body and the sexual practices of the humanoid Children of Crake, this novel interrogates what the posthuman thought experiment of extinction means for the future of human sexuality and intimacy. While the novel imagines a non-reproductive future for the human, that same future is nonetheless regulated by a governing logic of reproductive futurism, by which the novel’s politics of futurity is tethered to the figure of the child.

Oryx is sexualised as a non-reproductive body. Before the pandemic, Jimmy and Crake first encounter Oryx in child pornography, which fetishises the non-reproductive body of the child as an erotic placeholder for the love object. She looks eight years old, “just another little girl on a porno site,” and transfixes the boys with her “small-boned and exquisite” body “with nothing on her but a garland of flowers and a pink hair ribbon” (103). Her and two other girls kneel like “a trio of soulless pixies” before a large man, performing a sex act involving “whipped cream and a lot of licking ... going over the guy with their kittenish tongues and their tiny fingers” (103). Pornography dehumanises the girls, who represent an “innocent and obscene”

compounding of culture's regard for the child as an exploitable and incomplete citizen (103).

With "kittenish tongues," Oryx and the girls are animalised and associated with pigeons. If the girls stop performing, "a walking stick would come in from offside and prod them" (104). This recalls Jimmy's childhood memory of visiting the pigeon pens at OrganInc where he wishes "he had a long stick, so he could poke them—not to hurt them, just to make them run around" (30). The baby pigeons are "lined up in a row [in front of their mother], guzzling milk" (29) while the girls are lined up licking cream from the man's body (103). The "prodding" and "poking" of female children and pigeons exemplifies Adams's work on the symbolic associations between sexualised women and butchered nonhuman animals, which I discuss in Chapters Three and Six of this thesis. In *Oryx and Crake*, this association between girl and pigeon reflects a masculine desire to objectify, possess and even consume the female body. The central tension of *Oryx* is about who—Jimmy or Crake—gets to have her body. When Jimmy and Oryx have sex as adults, he licks her fingers like "bite-sized bits" of greasy fast food: "[t]his was the closest she could get to him without becoming food: she was in him" (371). Futurity is not mapped upon Oryx's body. As a sexualised child—exploited, animalised and metaphorically edible—Oryx has no reproductive future and even takes her name from an extinct species of antelope (365).

However after the pandemic, Jimmy retrospectively imbues Oryx's body with excessive and more-than-human reproduction. As part of the Children of Crake's emergent mythology, Jimmy tells a story to the Children about how "*animals, birds and fish*" emerged from "*a giant egg laid by Oryx herself*" (110 emphasis in original). Nonhuman animals become the "Children of Oryx" as Jimmy fantasises about the

now dead Oryx as a more-than-human mother with a body of extreme fertility. Oryx's maternal role extends to the Children of Crake, for whom she acts as "teacher" with basic lessons about different plant and animal species (363). The origin story of Oryx as mother to nonhuman animals represents the production of life without sex, like the Children of Crake are created by science and not intercourse. In these terms, Oryx and the Children both symbolise a sexual crisis for the masculine human subject, who in the time of extinction no longer controls reproduction or the bodies of women, children and animals.

Oryx's maternal role thus signifies how "the question of human reproduction" in this novel "gives face to a latent anxiety about nonhuman vitality" (Sheldon). In its reproductive and nonhuman excessiveness, Oryx's body defies Jimmy's need to possess and "pin her down" for himself (128): "[w]as there only one Oryx, or was she legion?" (362). Jimmy is left alone at the end of the world with this "legion" of patriarchal fantasies, "whimpering ridiculously, jerking off all by himself in the dark" (128). Novels like *Oryx and Crake*, but also P. D. James's *The Children of Men* (1992) and Gee's *The Ice People* (1998), suggest "that the greatest tragedy that might confront the planet would be the loss of human procreation" (Colebrook, "Counter" 3). As Colebrook writes, Atwood's fiction "thematizes the sexual delirium surrounding the very figure of apocalypse" for men ("Counter" 1) while also refusing "the idea of a paradise lost that can be imagined via the figure of a mourned feminine plenitude, and regained via the figure of a child to come" (3). Jimmy not only mourns for Oryx but mythologises her more-than-human "feminine plenitude." Jimmy's myth making may be futile, but it also draws attention to how the novel shifts futurity away from the human.

As a repeating motif in posthuman fictions, the figure of the child is crucial to understanding this novel's politics of futurity. Novels of the posthuman, as this thesis demonstrates, insistently index anxieties about humankind's precarious future through the symbolic potency child. *Oryx and Crake*'s non-reproductive future erases women but is populated by children: the humanoid posthuman species, the Children of Crake. Oryx tells the children that Crake is their creator (366), which Jimmy embellishes as part of their mythology: "*Crake made the bones of the Children of Crake out of the coral on the beach, and then he made their flesh out of a mango*" (110 emphasis in original). The "Crakers," as Oryx calls them, are the progeny of science and their engineer's misanthropic genius (365-66). They are not born of reproduction but "are like children" and "they need someone" to care for them (378). Although coded by the text as children, these "girls and boys" (8) have the bodies of adults by the age of seven (356); their status as children is symbolic. Jimmy is their "improbable shepherd" tasked with their survival (412). He leads them from the Paradise laboratory to "a better place" (407) and understands this as his "purpose" for having survived extinction himself: "He's saved the children" (125). Crake brings about human extinction for precisely this reason; the future after extinction is *for* these children.

What this means is that the non-reproductive future is still regulated by the logic of what Edelman calls "reproductive futurism" (2). As I return to throughout this thesis, reproductive futurism is a "social consensus" that is "impossible to refuse," which organises the future and social relations in advance by appealing to the symbolic child as the emblem of futurity (Edelman 2). Reproductive futurism has a renewed intensity in the context of extinction anxieties and underpins the now familiar appeals to the future by politics, such as, "what kind of future do we want to

leave our children?" In this way, ideas of the future and the child are put to work by reproductive futurism's heteronormative imperative, which delivers a future of continuity and human life.

For Edelman, queerness names the opposite of this child-centric future. Queerness embraces discontinuity through the death drive in "its open-eyed denial of a person's continuance" (Stockton 12 emphasis in original). Edelman's insistence upon saying "no" to the future and embracing queer discontinuity reaches an extraordinarily violent and polemical tone: "Fuck the social order and the Child in whose name we're collectively terrorized; fuck Annie; fuck the waif from *Les Mis*; fuck the poor innocent kid on the Net; fuck Laws both with capital *ls* and with small; fuck the whole network of Symbolic relations and the future that serves as its prop" (29 emphasis in original). Crake recognises the human's broad tendency to refuse discontinuity in this manner: "Men can imagine their own deaths ... and the mere thought of impending death acts like an aphrodisiac" so much so that "human beings hope they can stick their souls into someone else, some new version of themselves, and live on forever" (139). In this way, the child of reproductive futurism serves as "the emblem of parents' (impossible) continuity" and "spawns delusional visions" in which heteronormative futurity and human survival are tightly bound (Stockton 13).

I read the "delusional visions" of reproductive futurism in relation to extinction narratives. Children promise redemption, explains Edelman, but if, "however, there is *no baby* and, in consequence, *no future*, then blame must fall on the fatal lure of sterile, narcissistic enjoyments understood as inherently destructive of meaning and therefore as responsible for the undoing of social organization, collective reality, and, inevitably, life itself" (13 emphasis in original). Refusing reproductive continuity is not only on the side of queerness for Edelman, but on the

side of extinction—on the side of “undoing ... life itself.” In short, queerness embraces extinction, but also, extinction itself is queer (as I discuss in greater detail in Chapter Five).

Extinction ends a species’ reproductive future and radically undermines the capacity for politics to organise the future around the child. Recent fiction has explored the problems associated with a future predicated upon the “cult of the Child” (Edelman 30). Marcus’s *The Flame Alphabet* (2012) imagines a world in which children’s speech has become toxic and lethal to adults, forcing parents to abandon their offspring. In Gee’s *The Ice People*, children are scarce and become godlike following climate change’s reproductive crisis for humanity, finally becoming the “wild children” of a climate ravaged future that refuses human continuity (13). McCarthy’s *The Road* goes further and provides one of the most startling challenges to the reproductive futurism of the child in contemporary fiction. The campfire of a band of humans that have survived the apocalypse yields the stomach-turning revelation of a “black thing ... skewered over the coals” (211): “a charred human infant headless and gutted and blackening on the spit” (212). As Bersani and Adam Phillips write, the impetus and crisis of all human sexuality—reproductive or otherwise—is that “in having children we are making more deaths” (114-15). “[W]e are growing toward extinction,” they write, “children or no children” (114). Confronting extinction, as *Oryx and Crake* does, therefore means confronting the futility of all sexual practice to deliver a continuous human future.

Atwood’s novel maintains reproductive futurism but untethers it from the idea of a future for humans. Reproductive futurism becomes attached to and disrupted by the posthuman. The Children of Crake are unworldly and humanoid, and a reminder of culture’s coding of children as a not quite human “[s]pecies of strangeness”

(Stockton 8). They have “green eyes” (8) and “admirably proportioned” beautiful bodies that leave Jimmy “astonished” (115): “each one naked, each one perfect, each one a different skin colour” (8). The female children resemble “retouched fashion photos, or ads for a high-priced workout program” (115) and the male children look like “an entire Baroque fountain” or a “gay magazine centrefold” (183). This idealised gendering of bodies is accompanied by the children’s tribal social structure of traditional gender roles. The “placid” females (115) take a “great interest” in offspring (120) and the males mark territory with “special piss” (183). They use “purring” as a “self-healing mechanism” replicated from cats (184) and sing “beyond the human level” as if “crystals are singing” or like “ferns unscrolling—something old, carboniferous, but at the same time newborn, fragrant, verdant” (122). They eat only plants and, like rabbits and hares, produce “caecotrophs,” which are wads of “semi-digested herbage, discharged from the anus and reswallowed two or three times a week” (187). Undoubtedly, the novel is overt in its depiction of how the children blend human and nonhuman characteristics in Crake’s image of peaceable and non-destructive posthuman life. However as a metaphor for radically altered human consumption practices, the caecotrophs make clear that the children do not represent a utopic posthumanising of the human species; a paradise of posthuman life would surely not require people to eat their own faeces.

Furthermore, this gendered and tribal depiction of posthuman community unsettles ideas of the posthuman as a progressive reimagining of the human. For instance, Herbrechter optimistically writes: “posthuman bodies with their multiple possibilities precisely accentuate the precariousness of traditional characteristics of body-related identities like gender, sexuality but also ethnicity or race” (99). Braidotti helpfully articulates how the “posthuman political landscape is not necessarily more

egalitarian or less racist and heterosexist in its commitment to uphold, for instance, conservative gender roles and family values” (97; see also Colebrook, *Sex* 150). The children of *Oryx and Crake* illuminate the posthuman’s problematic relation to gender and race, and not only through their imputation of passive femininity protected by an active masculinity in a tribal social structure. The multi-coloured children initially seem to counter Jimmy’s white survivalism. But this evocation of a posthuman racial plurality gives way to suggestions of white colonialism’s sexual violence against non-white women, as Jimmy remembers historical texts warning Europeans against miscegenation and raping raced others (5).

The children concentrate sexual anxieties for the human. Detailed description is given to the sexual selection practices of the children, which expose the nonhuman animality of sexual behaviour. Sexual selection is “the ability to attract sexual partners” and “is not in itself to be conflated with successful reproduction: the aim is sexual relations, even if the most measurable form for sexual success is the generation of offspring” (Grosz, *Chaos* 29). Exemplified by a peacock’s plumage, sexual selection or “appeal” thus “imperils as much as it allures” and “produces difference” (Grosz 30). The children perform “a mating” with a “standard quintuplet, four men and the woman in heat” (193): “an athletic demonstration, a free-spirited romp” (195). Jimmy’s narrative recounts the mating practices of children like a meticulous catalogue of sexual selection characteristics. These characteristics are drawn from nonhuman animals. The “buttocks and abdomen” of female children blush “bright-blue” to signal reproductive readiness, “a trick of variable pigmentation filched from the baboons, with a contribution from the expandable chromatophores of the octopus” (193-94). The male children proceed to gift “flowers ... just as male penguins present round stones ... or as the male silverfish presents a sperm packet” (194), accompanied

by “musical outbursts, like songbirds” and a choreographed display of swaying erect penises like “the sexual semaphoring of crabs” (194). A female child selects four mates from this entourage and engages in sex until pregnant, at which point her blueness fades.

Posthuman sexuality is refracted through the nonhuman sexuality of animals and children. In this respect, the mating children recall the animalised descriptions of Oryx in child pornography, which I discussed earlier. As Grosz writes, “[a]nimals continue to haunt man’s imagination, compel him to seek out their habits, preferences, and cycles, and provide models and formulae by which he comes to represent his own desires, needs, and excitements” (*Space* 187-88). In these terms, the novel’s interest in nonhuman sexualities makes a posthumanist intervention in human sexuality. In the context of extinction’s challenge to reproductive futures, the sexual excesses of the children show that sexual behaviour does not exclusively serve a reproductive imperative. As Grosz puts it,

Perhaps sexuality itself is not so much to be explained in terms of its ends or goals (which in sociobiological terms are assumed to be the [competitive] reproduction of maximum numbers of [surviving] offspring, where sexual selection is ultimately reduced to natural selection) as in terms of its forces, its effects (which can less contentiously be understood as pleasure in indeterminable forms), which are forms of bodily intensification. (*Chaos* 33)

The sexual displays of the children are not about embracing a reproductive future, but rather draw attention to the “bodily intensification[s]” of colour, song and male genital choreography. Selection displays thus function like the “art” of the sexual body, which is not exclusively motivated by the imperative to reproduce and survive (as the novel has already signposted through Amanda’s vulture artworks). Nor is

sexual selection exclusively human or nonhuman. The mating practices of the children reveal the continuum of human and animal sexuality. Jimmy recognises his familial and generational continuity with the children as their “benevolent uncle” (7) and “*ancestor, come from the land of the dead*” (123 emphasis in original). The children make visible the complexity of human sexuality—its nonhuman quality and its ontological messiness.

Child sexuality consequently queers the human. Through the “mysterious rite” of sex and its posthumanist pressures (195), the children break down the conventional categories of human and nonhuman. Haraway describes the undoing of the human/nonhuman binary as one of queerness’s most “critical” tasks (“Misrecognition” xxiv). Similarly, Giffney and Hird utilise queerness to make trouble for the human’s naturalised separation from the nonhuman world (5). By installing a posthuman version of reproductive futurism’s symbolic child, *Oryx and Crake* invests in a future in which the emblem of the infant no longer promises the normative social good of human futurity.

Jimmy is tempted to breach the species boundary through sex. He is a figure of humanity’s twilight—“a creature of dimness, of the dusk” (6)—and admires the “amazingly attractive” children (8), whose naked bodies gleam “wet and glistening” on the hot beach (6). He feels “so dejected, so bereft” at being a sexual outsider to “these innocent creatures” (199), despite the paedophilic connotations of desiring those he freely describes as children. He considers attempting to join their mating rituals, “burst[ing] out of the bushes in his filthy tattered sheet, reeking, hairy, tumescent, leering like a goat-balled, cloven-hoofed satyr or a patch-eyed buccaneer from some ancient pirate film” (199). He is animalised, like a lascivious goat, and made villainous, like a raping pirate, by his desire for sexual pleasure. He imagines

the children's "dismay" at his violation, which invokes the taboo of bestiality: "as if an orang-utang had crashed a formal waltzfest and started groping some sparkly pastel princess" (199). His humanness is ruptured by his rape fantasy and queered in the sense described by Haraway. His sexual transgression—bestial and paedophilic—dehumanises him as "an orang-utang." His ape-like desire violates the human-like propriety of the children's "waltzfest," which is couched as a heteronormative dating ritual enjoyed by princesses and not orangutans. Furthermore, the orangutan also demonstrates how animals such as monkeys have historically been put to symbolic work and used to mount queer threats to the heteronormative institution of marriage (Austin 24; Chen 95).

Novels like *Oryx and Crake* make it impossible to ignore extinction's sexual crisis as an undeniably queer occurrence. Without the normative safeties of reproductive futures, the human is forced to confront questions of how to love and derive pleasure when faced with an increasingly uncertain future. Fictional posthuman thought experiments of extinction, but also the twenty-first century's milieu of extinction, demand that the human find new narratives of continuity beyond reproduction or embrace the queerer possibilities of discontinuity.

CHAPTER FIVE

Queer Extinction: Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods*

In a recent special issue of *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, Neel Ahuja suggests in timely fashion that “[p]erhaps queer theory has always been a theory of extinctions” (365). Drawing on the work of Bersani, Ahuja reiterates the entrenched association between homosexuality and death. In his infamous 1987 essay “Is the Rectum a Grave?” Bersani describes sex as a site for “the breakdown of the human itself” (221) and articulates a suicidal orientation for gay male sex in particular: “But if the rectum is the grave in which the masculine ideal ... of proud subjectivity is buried, then it should be celebrated for its very potential for death” (222). Bersani has been identified by many critics as the forefather “of a tradition of queer negativity” more commonly known as the anti-social strand of queer theory (Ahuja 366), but his conceptualisation of the sex and death bind is increasingly relevant to critical theory’s interest in human extinction. Fundamentally, extinction levels a threat against reproductive sexuality: it promises the breakdown of sexual difference in its reproductive sense, leading to the extinguishment of a species. Through halting reproduction and dismantling sexual difference, extinction is a queer phenomenon.

In the early twenty-first century, anxieties about possible human extinction have clustered around the problem of climate change. Alongside “inflections” of the human denoting a normative “masculinized” subject and an affective and “often-feminized subject of sympathy” defined by humane behaviour, Luciano and Chen observe that a particular sense of the human is “increasingly invoked in the context of climate change: that of the human as species” (190). This sense of the human is “[u]ndergirded by evolutionary thought,” which Luciano and Chen describe as giving

expression to a material world “outside human control” as well as the idea of an “unfolding” progression towards an ideal flourishing of the species, whether through a Marxist destruction of capitalism or by a eugenicist vision of racial superiority (190). They suggest that the “human as species, then, is both materially ‘here’ (and hence vulnerable to ‘degeneration’ or extinction) and speculative, not yet ‘here’” (190-91). Jeanette Winterson’s literary science fiction novel *The Stone Gods* (2007) dramatises this sense of the human as a species facing climate crises. Winterson’s literary intervention in climate change and extinction discourses demonstrates, as Karin Sellberg puts it, Winterson’s status as “one of the most ‘timely’ writers in the contemporary British canon” with writing that “reveal[s] an extraordinary ability to harness and adhere to prevalent narrative trends” in fiction and theory (66). *The Stone Gods* presents a speculative depiction of humankind as a destructive and terraforming species, but also as a species that is yet to arrive: humankind is yet to colonise Earth and yet to safeguard its reproductive future. As climate change and extinction confront a suicidal human species, *The Stone Gods* opens up a reiterative, non-reproductive and queer futurity for a posthuman couple. Winterson’s novel imagines a repetition of futures, through which the love story of a human and a robot (who change sex throughout time) embraces and transcends human extinction.

This chapter proposes reading Winterson’s novel as a fiction of extinction. The novel thematises extinction in a manner particular to text and narrative, employing a looping postmodern form to chart the love story of Billie and Spike through a series of extinction stories spanning sixty-five million years. The novel’s opening section, “Planet Blue” (1), is set on the planet of Orbus and depicts a frothy but sinister human society obsessed with youth and sexual thrills and about to embark on a colonising expedition to the newly discovered Planet Blue. The planned exodus

from Orbus, a “run-down rotting planet” exhausted by human industry and habitation (7), is necessitated by the immediate threat of species extinction. Humankind—in particular, the wealthy West, known in the novel as the Central Power—plans to colonise Planet Blue, which hangs in the sky as a symbol of renewed futurity and hope. As Clark explains, the image of the blue orb in space has shifted from a “defining icon of modernity,” captured in the 1968 Apollo photographs of the Earth seen from space, to “the obvious emblem of the Anthropocene” (“What” 12). He quotes astronaut Neil Armstrong’s surprise at realising that the “tiny pea, pretty and blue, was the Earth” (16). The “sight of the earth” is “an inexhaustible surprise, an event, like the arrival of even an expected child” (Clark, “What” 12). The blue planet, as in Winterson’s novel, is meant to deliver a reproductive future for the human while also symbolising the ecological precariousness of the twenty-first century.

Concurrent with this narrative set at the scale of the planet and the species is the story of Billie Crusoe, the novel’s focalising and recurring narrator. A twenty-first-century nod to Daniel Defoe’s intrepid Robinson, Winterson’s Crusoe is an outsider of Orbus’s hyper-sexualised, tech-obsessed, racially divided society of privilege. Tried for terrorist acts against the powerful MORE corporation, she refuses to adhere to society’s cult of genetically enhanced youth (70), chooses to live “a simple life” on her Arcadian farm (10) and falls in love with Spike, a female “*Robo sapiens*” (6 emphasis in original). Joining the expedition to Planet Blue, they both die after humanity’s plan to make the planet safe for humans ends in disaster: an asteroid, deflected by humans to eliminate the planet’s dinosaurs, collides earlier than expected and triggers an “ice age” (91). The romance narrative is reprised in the novel’s second section, “Easter Island” (115), where the now male Billy serves aboard Captain James Cook’s Second Voyage in the eighteenth century. Abandoned by his shipmates on the

iconic island of strange stone sculptures, he forms a close relationship with Spikkers, the son of a Dutch sailor and islander woman (128). As Spikkers falls to his death during an island ritual, Billy faces dying alone in this barren setting. The third and final sections of the novel are the grim narrative siblings to the hyperbole of “Planet Blue.” With “Post-3 War” (141) and “Wreck City” (177), the narrative enters “the new world” of the dystopian “Tech City” (167) and its wasted surrounds. It portrays a strictly controlled urban hive grappling with the fallout of a nuclear third world war, which has poisoned the earth and caused irreparable disability. Spike, a feminised robot head in this narrative iteration, has been built as a panacea of robotic rationality to humankind’s self-destructiveness. Billie, once again a woman, rescues Spike from the MORE Corporation and begins to comprehend the reiterative nature of their love, before she is killed.

I argue that *The Stone Gods* depicts extinction as a problem of sexual difference, which it explores through a series of posthumanist tropes: the robot, the planet, organic mutation and rock art. The novel refuses humankind the refuge of a reproductive future in favour of a thoroughly posthuman sense of non-reproductive creativity.

Scholarship has consistently interpreted Winterson’s writing in the context of her place within the feminist queer literary canon (Bradway; Doan; Griffin, “Acts”; Morrison, “Who”; Rine; Sellberg). Winterson’s fiction, argues Sellberg, is “not merely read *in relation* to queer theory—she has repeatedly been recognized as a *textbook example* of a queer writer” for her trademark disruptions of sex, gender and desire, as well as her engagement with queerness in its broader disruptive sense (66 emphasis in original). Tyler Bradway notes the proximity of Winterson to developments in queer theory, describing how her fiction “gained mainstream and

academic popularity alongside the institutionalization of queer theory” (185). Sellberg also emphasises the “timeliness” of Winterson’s work in relation to queer theory, and contends that “her fiction continually produces literary similes to the basic contentions established in queer theory” (66). As a result, writes Sellberg, novels such as *Written on the Body* (1992) have become staples of “first-year literature and gender studies courses” (66). Moreover, part of *Written on the Body* was republished in an anthology of feminist theory as if it were a theoretical text (see Winterson in Price and Shildrick). Readings of Winterson’s early work, such as her autobiographical novel *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985), draw attention to the significance of Winterson’s literary representations of queer intimacy between women. Laura Doan argues that *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* “map[s] an alternative social order, one that positions the lesbian at the center” (145) and Griffin interprets the novel’s depiction of lesbian love as “a commitment to women which *prominently* includes sexuality rather than being detailed in terms of some kind of emotional bonding” (“Acts” 85 emphasis in original). There is something about queerness that erases specificity. However, Winterson’s representations of lesbian sex and love are significant not just for their forthright depiction of queer relationships, but also for the specificity they bring to ideas of queerness. Winterson insists upon the particularity of queerness within the sexual and romantic intimacy between women.

Analyses of *The Stone Gods* tend to read the novel as a postmodern fable of gender and queer subject positionality. Jennifer A. Wagnor-Lawler pronounces the novel “the most spectacular of recent feminist utopian speculations” to explore selfhood as possibility rather than paternalistic stagnation (7; see also Jennings 133). Watkins contextualises the novel within a broader tradition of “women’s speculative writing” that imagines gender as a critical intervention in literature of the apocalypse,

which is traditionally patriarchal, colonialist and techno-scientific (119). Intervening in such a masculine tradition provides Winterson the fictional means to critique rampant gender discrepancies in the “aesthetic biotechnologies” of the body, as Luna Dolezal demonstrates (92), under a neoliberal logic that enshrines a particular vision of the human. Bradway asserts something similar about the novel’s depiction of queerness, arguing that Winterson’s stories of “queer exuberance” dismantle “the biopolitical codification of sexual identity” (186). Love in *The Stone Gods*, argues Bradway, “symbolizes relations that oppose the structures of contemporary biopower” (191) which seek to supervise and regulate a species population in terms of reproduction and mortality. In these terms, the novel articulates “the possibility of a queer future beyond [the] lethal repetition” of regularised human reproduction, as Abigail Rine claims, and instead “offers the transformative potential of poetic language as a vision of reproduction beyond the heteronormative” (74). *The Stone Gods* is explicit in interrogating questions of queerness and the human, which has clear ramifications for how the novel imagines the posthuman. For just as Winterson’s “self-queering” novels self-consciously intervene in the project of queer theory itself (Sellberg 66), so too does *The Stone Gods* intervene in the question of posthumanism.

The Stone Gods is also garnering recognition for its timely exploration of contemporary anxieties of climate crisis and the Anthropocene. It has been convincingly classified as an example of climate fiction (Milner, Burgmann, Davidson and Cousin; Trexler; Trexler and Johns-Putra), an emergent category in literary studies and the publishing industry that frequently combines the features of literary and genre fiction. Climate fiction gives expression to “the *cultural* phenomenon of climate change” with “inventive and innovative depictions” of climatologically defined worlds often in crisis (Trexler and Johns-Putra 185 emphasis

in original). Scholars highlight *The Stone God*'s direct engagement with climate change (Merola 126; Milner, Burgmann, Davidson and Cousin 8; Trexler and Johns-Putra 188) whilst also noting a lack of scholarship on the novel relative to Winterson's more literary output (Trexler and Johns-Putra 190)—a gap in the scholarship that my chapter seeks to address. More recently, Trexler has implicitly suggested that genre may account in part for the literary academy's slow uptake of *The Stone Gods*, observing how “novelists, such as Doris Lessing, Maggie Gee, Will Self, Ian McEwan, and Jeanette Winterson, regularly receive academic interest, yet their climate fiction is just beginning to attract sustained attention” (17). With the explosion of interest in the Anthropocene, attention to climate fictions such as *The Stone Gods* is sure to intensify.

Scholarship on *The Stone Gods* has not yet delivered a sustained explication of the novel's fascination with extinction. For instance, Nicole Merola argues that the novel “operates as an exemplary Anthropocene text” through its “amplification of the concept of material persistence” (122). While this is undoubtedly true, conceptualisations of the Anthropocene also demand explicit engagement with human extinction, as *The Stone Gods* clearly demonstrates. Furthermore, the novel actively disrupts ideas of human extinction as a singular, cataclysmic event. Winterson's novel abounds with stories of extinction. Consequently, in my examination of *The Stone Gods* I share Thom van Dooren's grounding conviction “that there is no single ‘extinction’ phenomenon” (7), a perhaps seemingly simple assertion but one often overlooked for various anthropocentric motives. Extinction functions by co-implication, which is quite different to the fetishising of a species' particular “specialness” clearly seen in conservation discourse. As van Dooren makes it his project to demonstrate with the example of extinct bird species, “diverse living

beings—human and not—are drawn into the extinctions of others” in ways that exceed calls for maintaining biodiversity (7). Van Dooren recognises that extinction matters beyond the scope of conservationist discourse, which as Jamie Lorimer demonstrates frequently relegates species death to an “extinction of experience” for an increasingly wildlife-deficient human population (120).

Echoing the association between gay sex and death, extinction and the Anthropocene recast all human sexuality as deathly. Rampant human reproduction becomes not only ecologically destructive on a planetary scale, but anticipates the extinction of humans and other species. Ahuja provocatively asserts that “decades after the onset of the AIDS crisis, the climate crisis presses queer theory for a planetary account of reproduction” (367), which Luciano and Chen suggest “troubles any queer posture against reproduction” (199). As this chapter demonstrates, *The Stone Gods* takes up this challenge and negotiates a future defined by human extinction but mitigated by an exuberant creativity that is both posthumanist and queer.

The Lesbian Posthuman: Sexual Difference and Extinction

“My lover is made of a meta-material, a polymer tough as metal,” intones Billie (83) as she catalogues the inorganic body of the “incredibly sexy” robot (6) who has “woo’d” her (81). Robo sapiens are not just machines but a new species representing the “first artificial creature that looks and acts human, and that can evolve like a human—within limits, of course” (17). Billie mentally dissects her lover’s body and itemises her constructed posthuman difference. Spike’s polymeric encasing is “pliable and flexible and capable of heating and cooling, just like human skin” (83). At her core is a mechanical “articulated titanium skeleton and a fibre-optic neural highway”

(83). Robots are “neural” or cognitive and humans are “limbic” or emotional, according to the novel’s repeated binary logic (75; 83; 238). Robo sapiens embody the traditional humanist role of rational thinker, while humankind is ruled by feeling and sentimentality. The robot symbolises the formative posthuman dream of an updated and improved version of the human that could transcend the species through a kind of technologically mediated evolutionary jump forward (see Hayles, *How*). However, the robot also announces the novel’s interrogation of human sexual difference. Desire for the posthuman—as technological future and interspecies lover—disrupts the coordinates of human sexual difference, which is regularly orientated toward the reproductive future of the heterosexual couple.

Reducing sexual difference to reproductive potential is a problematic claim, as Grosz demonstrates (“Nature” 72). Reproduction, she asserts, “is its indirect product but never the telos or goal of sexual difference” (73). However, in the context of extinction, the reproductive potential of sexual difference takes on a different tenor. Survival is at stake. *The Stone Gods* employs the posthuman to announce and examine a time of reproductive and climate crisis. Bounded by these crises, the interspecies same-sex romance of Billie and Spike disrupts the normative future of desire and intimacy. Their queer intimacy promises no reproduction and embraces its own extinguishment. It provides an example of a relationship conducted in what Halberstam names “queer time,” which “emerges most spectacularly, at the end of the twentieth century, from within those gay communities whose horizons of possibility have been severely diminished by the AIDS epidemic” (*Queer Time* 2). However as Halberstam writes, queer time is “not only about compression and annihilation,” as critics such as Bersani and Edelman have forcefully argued (2). Queer time “is also about the potentiality of a life unscripted by the conventions of family, inheritance,

and child rearing” (Halberstam 2). In this way, Billie and Spike engender a series of futures outside of reproductive time and beyond the all too human scale of the heterosexual couple.

Luce Irigaray argues that “[s]exual difference is one of the major philosophical issues, if not the issue, of our age” (5). Following Irigaray, Grosz describes sexual difference as “the question of our age,” which has the force to “shake ontology and bring a striking transformation of epistemology, ethics, aesthetics, and politics” (*Becoming* 103). Grosz’s deployment of the concept is rooted in evolutionary time scales, owing a particular debt to Darwinian thought: “Sexual difference is the very machinery, the engine, of living difference, the mechanism of variation, the generator of the new” (101). It is about two kinds of material bodies with different capacities and about how these two forms of the body produce different logics and different ways of being in and understanding the world.

Sexual difference is about how such a fundamental difference is inscribed in culture. As Grosz describes, Irigaray’s work on sexual difference has been met with “charges of homophobia, racism, xenophobia, and Eurocentrism” (*Becoming* 100). Even Grosz, despite her commitment to an expansive feminist theory, cannot seem to overcome the normative biases of the concept. For example, she asserts “one remains a man or a woman” regardless of gender-reassignment, surgical or chemical sex change, or trans identities (109-10). Sexual difference is so fundamental, argues Grosz, that non-traditional families with same-sex parents are always imitative of a heterosexual “template,” as are butch-femme relations between women, which she describes as “parodic” (108-09).

These claims are intensely problematic for a range of self-evident reasons. Grosz insists that the sexual difference between male and female bodies is

“irreducible” and is therefore “not a comparative relation between two entities ... like apples and oranges” (“Nature” 71). Grosz makes this point to demonstrate how sexual difference is anti-egalitarian and not about striving for equality between the sexes (73). Sexual difference is a positive, rather than a comparative, term of difference for two distinct sexual kinds. However, as the problematic examples outlined above attest, asserting the irreducibility of sexual difference can install sexual dimorphism, or the heterosexual couple, as the pinnacle of human value. In this respect, posthumanism and feminism are immensely helpful because both critical frameworks are aligned in their commitment to critiquing the male/female binary and its role in hierarchies of humanness. Colebrook suggests that “[f]ar from the posthuman ‘turn’ being a vanquishing of feminism, one might say that the posthuman is required by feminism’s critical trajectory” (*Sex* 9) and Alaimo argues that “[f]eminists, long cognizant of what it means to act as embodied minds, to occupy the often political sites where concepts and materiality mingle, have developed modes of art, activism, and theory that accentuate posthumanist, new materialist ontologies, avant la lettre” (301). Non-normative expressions of sexual difference can become entirely reducible to forms of less-than-human difference. This occurs precisely because of how sexual difference has pressed upon cultural understandings of human and nonhuman bodies, their desires and capacities for intimacy.

The representation of Spike enlivens ideas of sexual difference and the human. *The Stone Gods* makes Spike’s posthuman difference explicit. The otherness of the robot is a clearly readable sign within the narrative world’s truncated language system of “[s]ingle-letter recognition” (11): “R is for Robot” (16), like a simple entry in a didactic children’s book. Spike is “[h]eartless,” “[g]orgeous” (18) and looks “like a movie star” (33), and Billie is immediately drawn to her striking manufactured

beauty. Billie has “never seen [a robot] as impressive” (18) or as “drop-dead gorgeous” as Spike (33). In her desire for Spike, Billie recognises Spike’s robotic difference and its implications for sex and intimacy. Billie learns of Spike’s “sexual services” to the male crew of the first exploratory journey to Planet Blue (33), which involved having “sex with spacemen for three years” (34). The design of Spike’s attractive appearance is thought to be “good for the boys on the mission” (33), during which she “used up three silicon-lined vaginas” (34). She is excessively sexually functional without being reproductive. Through the depiction of a posthuman body with a replaceable vagina, Spike’s sexually different body caters to male desires. Her difference, although radically posthuman, remains tethered to the traditional dimorphic structure of human sexual difference.

Spike’s abundant sexual utility is matched by her lacking romantic love’s overdetermined organ. Robots like Spike “don’t have hearts” (17). Spike’s heartlessness signifies the material lack of the organ within her body, but also suggests an affective deprivation. As an “artificial creature” (17), she may be incapable of authentic feeling and love. The absence of a heart excludes her from the particular sense of the human as an affective subject defined by humane behaviour and emotion (see Luciano and Chen 190).

Reading the representation of Spike highlights the tension between gendered subject positionality and its cultural, inscriptive approximation of biological sex. The depiction of her “fabulously expensive to make” robotic and feminine body (17) animates familiar tensions of philosophy and literary studies, between discourse and materiality, epistemology and ontology. Moreover, these tensions are complicated by Spike’s symbolic capital value as “the ultimate piece of personal wealth-display” (17). If sex is rooted in biology and Spike is a technologically manufactured robot,

can her body be considered sexually different as female? Or, does the posthuman construction of a feminine body serve as a comment upon the cultural construction of all gendered bodies within capitalist society? Spike describes gender as a “human concept ... and not very interesting” (76). In spite of distancing herself from prevailing structures of gender, she declares herself as “still a woman” regardless of her “advanced” robot body (34).

The Stone Gods is specifically about the bodies of women. Unlike Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and McCarthy’s *The Road* (2006), Winterson’s posthuman imagination does not erase women in order to explore ideas of extinction. *The Stone Gods* connects the impossibility of sustaining romantic love with maternal love’s failure, which is a repeating theme of Winterson’s work from *Written on the Body* to her memoir *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?* (2011). Here, Winterson writes, “[b]ut mother is our first love affair. Her arms. Her eyes. Her breast. Her body. And if we hate her later, we take that rage with us into other lovers. And if we lose her, where do we find her again?” (*Why* 160). Like Winterson herself, Billie is adopted and the narrative describes the trauma she experiences at being cast out of “my mother’s kingdom, at sail on amniotic seas” (152). Billie’s exile from the maternal “kingdom” resonates with a similar territorialising of the female body in *Written on the Body*. The lover’s body of Louise is “land” (52) to be mapped, explored and mined (20), and inspires in the narrator problematic fantasies of virgin territory: “Did Columbus feel like this on sighting the Americas?” (52). For *The Stone Gods*, birth is also imagined to be like the discovery of unfamiliar country: being born is “a shipwreck, the mewling infant shored on unknown land. My mother’s body split open and I was the cargo for salvage” (146). The abandonment of birth is impossible for Billie to recuperate, who desires to be reunited with the maternal body, “the

person whose body I was, whose body was me” (149). Instead, her mother’s body is imagined “like a light-years-away star” (150), impossibly distant and nonhuman, but also evoking the novel’s hopeful symbol of Planet Blue: “There she is, a star the size of a city, pulsing through the universe with burned-out energy” (154). Humankind’s mission to colonise Planet Blue can be read as Billie’s symbolic attempt to rediscover the lost maternal body.

The Stone Gods pairs lesbian eroticism with Planet Blue’s colonisation. “*I want to touch you,*” says Spike to Billie, who responds: “*And if you did touch me, what then?*” (82 emphasis in original). Their intimate exchange, carried out in italics, is interleaved with Captain Handsome’s triumphant plan to rid Planet Blue of its “teeming impossible experiments with life” to enable the resettlement of humankind (84). Handsome wants to eliminate the maternal plenitude of Planet Blue with another motherly body: the “arch-mother of all asteroids” (81), which will create an apocalyptic “duststorm” and “black out the sun completely” (82). Winterson juxtaposes Handsome’s plans of terraforming and colonising Planet Blue with Spike and Billie’s discovery of “*a language of beginning*”: “*And you once voyaged would be my free and wild place that I would never try to tame*” and “*never be sold or exchanged*” (82 emphasis in original). Bradway reads this juxtaposition as an expression of how, for Winterson, “queer love embraces uncontrollable difference” (195). Handsome’s plan requires “the fatal suppression of difference” on Planet Blue (Bradway 195), while Spike’s seduction of Billie engenders difference through its language of queer eroticism and exploration of the lover’s body. Their discovered “language” of lesbian love is informed by discourses historically used to dehumanise and colonise women, including ideas of virgin territory, voyages of discovery, and the tamed and commodified nonhuman world. Moreover, Planet Blue’s colonisation is

initially framed as a poetic and loving enterprise. Poetry, the form of literature that teaches Spike how to love (81), literally underlines Planet Blue's promise of a future. The planet is introduced to Central Power citizens with poetry "slanting under the images": "*She is all States, all Princes I ...*" (6 emphasis in original). Through these lines from John Donne's poem "The Sun Rising" (c. 1603-04), the expansive romance of the lesbian couple imaginatively appropriates a whole planet. The geography of "the body-beloved," for Spike and Billie, "is the landmass of the world" to be joyously, endlessly explored (110).

Billie sexualises Spike's body as nonhuman: "Hand over hand, beginning the descent of you. Hand over hand, too fast, like my heartbeat. This is the way down, the cliff, the cave. No safety, no certainty of return" (83). This description of lesbian sex with a posthuman body defiantly remobilises those patriarchal discourses that have excluded women from the category of the human. With a lover's quickening "heartbeat," Billie scales the geographical features of Spike's eroticised more-than-human body—her "descent," her "way down," her "cliff" and her "cave." The cave operates as a place of sex and death. After the asteroid plan goes awry and the ice age begins to set in, Billie and Spike venture to "a ridge, riddled with caves" (101) and take refuge in a "rough rock cave" (102). Already established as a sexual metaphor, the cave is also the place that Billie and Spike die. Spike has Billie detach her head from her body to save power. As a head, "[s]he smiles, we talk, we kiss" (111). Rending the body apart becomes an act of love and, in particular, draws attention to the specificity of some lesbian sex acts. "Kiss me," says Billie, "Your mouth is a cave. This cave is your mouth. I am inside you, and there is nothing to fear" (111). The cave is a nonhuman metaphor of oral pleasure, signifying Spike's vagina and mouth. The novel's erotics of the mouth also represent the desire to survive through

eating: “I’m sorry you can’t eat me,” says Spike, “I would like to be able to keep you alive” (108). The sexuality of eating bodies is codified elsewhere in the novel as acceptable sexual practice rather than cannibal taboo: at a sex club, child prostitutes are described as meat (23) and a woman has “smiling” breasts, with grafted mouths instead of nipples, so as to service multiple male clients (23-24). *Written on the Body* also unites sex and consumption: “[w]hen I sit down to eat it’s you I’m eating” (15) and “[e]at of me and let me be sweet” (20). Spike’s desire to be eaten is undeniably sexual, but is also an expression of her despair that Billie cannot literally eat her body and survive. As if to fulfil a conventional romantic script, Spike desires to be consumed by passion. To be engulfed by the lover’s body is not just an expression of sexual annihilation, but also an extinction of the self. Love’s appetite is deadly, *The Stone Gods* suggests.

Spike’s lesbian robot head emphasises the discrepancies of sexual difference between the reproductive scale of populations and the intimate scale of the non-reproductive couple. In the novel’s final narrative section, Billie and Spike escape Tech City’s hegemonic capitalism for Wreck City’s “twenty alternative communities” (207). Collectively named “the Alternative” (205), these wasteland communities include “the 1960s Free Love” movement (207), women-only “Interplanetary Vegans” (208) and an order of nuns (211). In this iteration of the character, Spike has “no body because she won’t need one” (158). Billie holds her head in her hands “like an offering” (222): “She is a perfect head on a titanium plate. She’s like a prophet, she’s like a thing out of Dante, she’s Oz, she’s Medusa ... she’s God” (158-59). Spike is kidnapped by Nebraska and Alaska, “naked” and “gorgeous” refugees named for American states (204). The hedonistic scene is furnished with “bottles of champagne and white leather” and “one million tins” of “sardines in olive oil” (206). Spike and

Nebraska have oral sex: Billie finds Spike “moored between the long piers of Nebraska’s legs, lapping at the jetty” (208). Spike is programmed to “accept new experiences” and recognises that this sexual practice, like her robot body, “has no reproductive function” and is therefore “ridiculous, perverted and impossible” (209). Sexual difference, as guarantor of humankind’s reproductive future, is made irrelevant by *The Stone Gods*. Through Spike’s totemic robot head, the narrative remobilises sexual difference and diverts its reproductive promise. Through the body of Nebraska, America’s reproductive future is “perverted” by oral pleasure. The American nation state, no longer a global power but a refugee, is a bodily site of pleasurable sexual difference: “cunnilingus” (209) and a vibrating “electric tongue” (210). This sex scene shows the hyper-capitalist and neoliberal West as no longer able to safeguard its future through the means of production—reproductively, economically or otherwise.

Robots are understood as a different species within the novel, which brings together sexual difference and species boundaries. The species boundary between humans and robots is sexually and punitively policed: “Inter-species sex is punishable by death” (18). Chen shows that “the incursion of species difference” introduces queer disruption into ideas of human love and sex, and the regulation of human intimacy (142). Intimacy between different species “yield[s] something that is *trans* in the sense of the undecidability, elusiveness, or reluctance toward the fixity” of the other-than-human’s sex (142 emphasis in original). Chen discusses Nagisa Oshima’s 1986 film *Max, Mon Amour*, which features a romance between Charlotte Rampling’s Margaret, a human character, and a male chimpanzee named Max. Despite the film’s construction of a “presumptive maleness” for Max, the “affections” between Margaret and Max provoke a significant question: “to what extent can one trust that a male

chimp is sexed *or* gendered ‘like’ a human male?” (142 emphasis in original). In relation to *The Stone Gods*, the queer implications of Chen’s question are intensified. The novel does not just ask if Spike, as a posthuman robot, is sexed or gendered like a human female. Spike is also, and significantly, a queer character. Winterson therefore interrogates established discourses that have systematically denied the human status of queer identities and bodies. Sex with robots, or “inter-species sex,” is “illegal” in the novel (18), even though Spike freely admits to sexually servicing male astronauts. However, as a sexual transgression that makes the sexual subject killable, the novel’s framing of lesbian sex critiques the familiar pairing of death and homosexuality as well as the unjust dehumanisation of queer sexual intimacy.

To Billie, Spike seems almost nonliving. As a robot, Spike’s sexualised posthuman body is clearly devoid of biology’s key signifiers of life, with Billie thinking “how strange it was to lie beside a living thing that did not breathe” (99; 143). Ironically, Orbus’s hyperbolic construction of sex as the domain of the “young and beautiful” has also made people “bored to death with sex” (22). Orbus is in the midst of a “global crisis” of sexual apathy, deadened pleasure and surgically uniform bodies: “All men are hung like whales. All women are tight as clams below and inflated like lifebuoys above” and “no one gets turned on” (23). Compared to these comically beachy and banal descriptions of the sexual status quo, Billie’s desire for Spike reads as adventurous, pleasurable and deviant for its attraction to a body that is improperly alive. In these terms, she shares similarities with those Central Power citizens who enjoy a sex industry trading in the titillating possibilities of “freaks and children” (23). She, too, is attracted to what is sexually forbidden and non-reproductive.

Winterson's novel connects the fragility of sexual dimorphism with the possibility of human extinction. *The Stone Gods* describes a breakdown of relations between men and women. Reproductive sexuality has diminished and humankind's future is in a precarious state. The novel aligns the potential extinction of women with humankind's destruction of the planet: "[t]he future of women is uncertain" (26) and "the future of the planet is uncertain" (216). The novel problematically maps species futurity onto the declining reproductive utility of women's bodies (26). As Billie remarks, "[w]e don't breed in the womb any more, and if we aren't wanted for sex ... But there will always be men" (26). Like the planet's natural bounty, the female body is reduced to another resource that has been exhausted in aid of man's survival.

Pleasure on Orbus caters mainly to the desires of men. The trade in "sexy sex" services a clientele fixated on fetishistic, not reproductive, sexual practices (23). Humans are "all perverts now" (22); facing extinction, humankind refuses survival through reproductive sexuality in favour of an industry of non-reproductive pleasure. The novel's central depiction of human sexuality on Orbus takes place in the Peccadillo "perverts' bar," which offers a smorgasbord of sexual options (22). At Peccadillo, men have sex with "freaks and children": "[g]iantesses," "[g]rotesques" and "[k]ids under ten," bought from other countries, who "are known as veal in the trade" (23). The sex club represents a psychosexual fantasy where patriarchal dominance and predatory desire intersect. This is clearly evident in the club's "Veal Special" (23), which presents paedophilic desire through a metaphor of meat consumption. Sex with children becomes as innocuous as a bargain at the butcher's whilst also locating male desire within the historical tradition of an inherently masculine, resourceful and heterosexual hunter (see Pilgrim). Within this logic, the hunter's animalised prey—for *The Stone Gods*, the child—is dehumanised, feminised

and sexualised. Organised by male desire, sexual difference maps transspecies otherness onto the bodies of children. Variations of this sexualised species hybridity plays out in the other novels of the posthuman examined by this thesis, including the students of Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, the livestock of Faber's *Under the Skin*, the children of Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, and the fabricants of Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*. As transspecies sexual objects, Winterson's child sex workers are not only killable but also already killed, which *The Stone Gods* emphasises by describing them as veal. Sex with children becomes not only bestial but necrophilic. Billie spies a "blond-haired guy ... heading for the Jacuzzi with a ten-year-old boy on his shoulders and a ten-year-old girl in his arms" (23). This description evokes familiar heteronormative images of the happy family unit. His children, however, have become his animalised sex toys rather than evidence of his procreative contribution to humankind's reproductive future. "This is the future, honey," quips a club bouncer (26). Futurity dies with the predatory exhaustion of the child's material body and symbolic promise of a replenished future.

Alongside the animalised body of the child, *The Stone Gods* repeatedly returns to the planetary scale of the female body. As humankind's new "home" (4), Planet Blue is gendered as feminine throughout the novel (26; 69; 74; 84). Moreover, the intimate scale of love is imagined at the "galactic scale" of planetary ecological destruction (68). As one character puts it, "every time we fall in love" (69) it is like a "global disaster" (68). Sexual difference is mapped at a vast scale where "[w]omen are just planets that attract the wrong species" (69). A masculine version of the human species colonises Planet Blue's feminised virgin land with the same imperialistic desire as "the men who found the Indies, the Americas, the Arctic Circle" (6). Territory and its exploitation are gendered and raced here, reflecting a biopolitical

management of human worth measured by the white heterosexual male. *The Stone Gods* depicts men devouring the bodies of women and planets alike: Pink McMurphy, whose husband desires young girls, describes how men “use us up, wear us out, then cast us off for a younger model so that they can do it all again” (69). Images of a “dying red planet” with exposed “guts” (68), a “whored-out world” (161) and “a world dark-coloured now in purple and red, livid, raw, exposed, like a gutted thing” (101) suggest not only an exhaustion of ecological systems but an evisceration of the female body. The collateral of humankind’s survival is female, nonhuman and planetary.

Love and Mutation: Sexual Indifference and Extinction

Undoubtedly, questions of sexual difference inform how we tell stories of human extinction. As Grosz writes, “[s]exual difference is the means by which the natural cultivates culture” (“Nature” 89). What Grosz means is that sexual difference is not just about reproduction; in humans and in other species, sexual difference and sexual selection produce excessive display and creativity. Grosz examines the evolutionary function of birdsong as a mechanism of sexual selection, which in fact produces excessive, creative difference beyond attracting a mate: “What music and the arts indicate is that (sexual) taste and erotic appeal are not reducible to the pragmatic world of survival ... they indicate that those living beings that ‘really live,’ that intensify life ... bring something new to the world, create something that has no other purpose than to intensify, to experience itself” (*Chaos* 39). Culture, Grosz writes, is shaped by sex. However, sex also has a “necessary relation to extinction” (Colebrook, “Sexual” 168), as queer theory has already shown. In her feminist approach to extinction, Colebrook argues that in the early twenty-first century, climate change

reveals the extinctive force of sex. She locates climate change in “a certain sexual feedback, whereby the imaginary of human reproduction that has allowed human life to figure itself as organically self-sustaining, has come to destroy the very system that would allow human life to sustain itself into a future imaginable as human” (“Sexual” 169). In this sense, the human cannot comprehend a future outside its own reproductive “imaginary,” even when faced by the destruction of its life-sustaining systems.

Extinction haunts all sexual practices, reproductive or otherwise, in ways that defy the conventional association of homosexuality and death (Bersani; Bersani and Phillips; Dollimore; Edelman). Sexual difference, in its reproductive sense, fails to recognise the spectre of extinction. As I write in Chapter Four, Bersani and Phillips demonstrate how Western humankind’s idealised elaboration of sexuality as a future-oriented narrative of the self is an attempt to ward off the knowledge that “like all animals, [humans] are a project that issues in nothing” (114). Following Irigaray and Grosz’s emphatic assertions of sexual difference’s importance to the human, Colebrook critiques what she calls “the dyad of sexual difference as fulfilment” because of “the lures and laziness that the sexual dyad as a figure has offered for thinking” (“Sexual” 167). She argues that fixating on the dimorphic sexual difference of the couple has “precluded the thought of the logic of extinction that at once resides within sexual reproduction but that also demands a thought of reproduction beyond that of sexuality” (“Sexual” 167-68). Colebrook names this idea “sexual indifference,” which is a concept for thinking about “production and ‘life’ that does not take the form of the bounded organism reproducing itself through relation to its complementing other” (“Sexual” 167). It names “the forces of life, mutation, generation and exchange *without* any sense of ongoing identity or temporal synthesis”

which have “always been warded off as evil and unthinkable, usually associated with a monstrous inhumanity” (Colebrook, “Sexual” 171 emphasis in original). In short, sexual indifference is about a non-reproductive future. Applied to the human, sexual indifference is about the production of difference—and the production of human futurity—beyond reproduction.

In *The Stone Gods*, mutating human bodies and the queer love story of Billie and Spike represent forms of sexual indifference. Winterson’s novel reimagines the generation of human difference and futurity beyond reproduction and beyond extinction.

The “Dead Forest,” on the outskirts of Wreck City, is a place of mutating human bodies in the novel (192). In the aftermath of the nuclear Post-3 War, Wreck City is a place of economic, political and cultural asylum from the heightened capitalistic control and anxious surveillance of Tech City, “the official part of town” (179). Tech City is an urban island “ringed” by Wreck City’s “bandit-architecture” of “railway carriages laid end to end ... like an ancient city wall” circling Tech City’s “banlieu” (179). Billie is assisted in negotiating Wreck City by Friday, a barman and another intertextual reference to Defoe’s classic novel *Robinson Crusoe* (188). Friday declares the territory of the Wreck City to be “a place where anything can happen” (187). Wreck City is “its own state—like the Vatican” (212). It is gloomy bastion of refuge for “[c]ertain people, certain animals, looking for a landing-place” but also for culture: “Books came here like people and animals” (193). Imagined as a “landing-place,” Wreck City continues the novel’s engagement with stories of exploration, shipwreck and the discovery of “new world[s]” (8; 62; 94; 150).

Wreck City “stretches on” into a geography named “the Unknown” (188). The nuclear fallout from Post-3 War has created a ravaged and dangerous landscape. The

“Dead Forest” is part of a radioactive “Red Zone” (192), symbolically linking the human’s nuclear despoliation of Wreck City’s ecology with Orbus’s “red” planetary death (68). However, whereas Orbus is characterised by a natural world in decay that cannot sustain a human population for much longer, the radioactive Dead Forest produces a growing population of transformed human bodies. The “petrified forest” is a place of pain, illness and horror (191). Its “blackened and shocked trees” and eerie silence create the atmosphere of “a haunted house” (191). With “pulpy” foliage and “baleful aspect,” the forest resembles “nothing from Nature”; it is “more like a nineteenth-century asylum” (200). These evocative locales evoke tormented human lives by signalling places of pathologised subjectivity (the asylum) and the malevolent subconscious (the haunted house). The concept of “life,” write Jami Weinstein and Colebrook, “has been used to humanize, racialize, gender, pathologize, and manage human and non-human bodies.” David Toomey describes the anthropocentric parochialisms that have shaped how “life” has been conceptualised and suggests expanding “life” to include the highly posthuman idea of “weird life”: “beta life, hypothetical life, nonstandard life, nonterranean life, unfamiliar life, life as we do *not* know it, alternative biology, and (you knew this was coming) Life 2.0” (xvii emphasis in original). Life in the Dead Forest is explicitly posthuman, characterised by mutation and evolution: “It’s re-evolving,” declares Friday, “It’s Life after Humans, whatever that is” (188). However, any sense of evolutionary mutation beyond the human is circumvented by the novel’s insistence on circularity and reiteration. Humankind, including the posthuman, is “doomed to repetition” (216). In the context of Winterson’s reworking of the human, the novel’s refrain of “[e]verything is imprinted for ever with what it once was” (105; 144; 246) reads as a comment on the impossibility of making a discrete break with the human.

The forest's mutating posthuman bodies represent a sexually indifferent production of life. Recalling Colebrook's description of sexual indifference, life in the forest is inhuman and monstrous, rescinding a recognisable human form and identity. The crowd of bodies to emerge from the forest is marked by gruesome mutation: "ragged, torn, ripped, open-wounded, ulcerated, bleeding, toothless, blind, speechless, stunted mutant, alive—the definition of human" (232). Winterson's mutating posthuman bodies are significant precisely because they unite reproductive sexual difference alongside mutating sexual indifference. The forest people, in short, represent sexually reproductive posthuman bodies as well the creation of posthuman difference through mutating bodies, which exceed the norms of the human body. The sexual practices of forest people are dehumanised, animalised and plantlike: "They bred, crawled out their term, curled up like ferns, died where they lay, on radioactive soil" (232). This version of the posthuman is organised by a kind of reproductive lifecycle based in rhythms of the nonhuman world, including ideas of animal breeding, the reflexive movement of plants, and bodies committed to the earth after death. Dehumanised, the forest people breed like animals and create more-than-human materialities beyond sexual dimorphism and its reproductive promise.

The Stone Gods insistently defines the forest people as definitively human (232-33). The forest people are the unrecognised victims of nuclear war, like "a new generation of humans made out of the hatred of others" (233): "the bomb-damage, the enemy collateral, the ground-kill, blood-poisoned, lung-punctured, lymph-swollen ... yellow eyes, weal-bodied, frog-mottled, pustules oozing thick stuff, mucus faces, bald, scarred, alive, human" (232). They move "on all fours, coming in on crutches made from rotten forest wood" (232): children "limping club-footed, looking up from the hinge of their necks," women with "nipples eaten by cancer" and men with "skin

so burned that the muscles underneath were on show like an anatomy textbook” (233). Here, Winterson’s polemical tone widens the circle of ethical concern to include those people cast out of the body politic. They emerge from the foliage like “thing[s] dug up from the grave” and as “creatures with mossy eyes, their stones kicked over, forced into the light ... blinking, twisty, slimy, exposed” (233). Through being “exposed,” the forest people are shown to embody a shameful secret of the body politic: the exclusion of non-normative lives from the category of the human. As collateral of “the regrettable acts of war,” their bodies are like testimony exhumed from “the private graves of public ignorance” (233-34). When they speak, the mutated body defines their self-expression: they spit “blood, each word made out of a blood vessel” (232). The gruesome spectacle of these “mutants” (235) reflects how the nonhuman turn in philosophy and theory has contextualised the human within the more-than-human world. Mutant bodies are likened to a range of forms traditionally excluded from the human, including disabled, animal and dead bodies, which are ontologically similar to the human, and plants, which are ontologically at a greater distance from the human. Winterson’s call to recognise the ethical standing of the posthuman is thus emphatically ethical. The novel’s critique exposes the failure of the human as a category of inclusion.

The idea of species extinction also frames this ethical exposure of the posthuman. Recalling the “Planet Blue” section of the novel, the forest people are like “creatures on another planet—from another planet, lost on this one, as though a line of creatures long extinct had resurfaced through shale layers of time” (234). Through the metaphor of alien life, recognising posthuman lives is likened to a de-extinction project: recovering an animal from species death and salvaging their creaturely line from the planet’s geological archive. Like the Anthropocene thought experiment of

imagining a world without humans in order to survey human impact on the planet, the novel's excavation of a post-extinction geology—Winterson's "shale layers of time"—exposes an expanded version of the human. In a way, this reworked idea of humankind can be described as inhuman, which Cohen defines as a term that denotes a relation of radical difference and inescapable intimacy to the human (*Stone* 10). The forest people are both quintessentially human and radically different, like aliens on another planet or creatures of stone.

In a more hopeful sense, the reiterative structure of Billie and Spike's queer love story embraces the possibilities of sexual indifference. For Billie and Spike, "[l]ove is an intervention" in the story of human extinction (83; 217; 244). Their love story intervenes in and transcends the novel's stories of extinction, as if in answer to what Chrulew describes as "one of the central ethical questions of our time: how should we love in a time of extinction?" (139). Winterson retells Billie and Spike's love story several times, after their deaths and after several depictions of extinction. Sellberg argues that "[l]ove, for Winterson, is a continual apocalypse" (76). Apocalyptic love features throughout Winterson's writing. In *Written on the Body*, love is imagined to exceed the end of the world through the life-giving lover's body: "[t]he world will come and go in the tide of a day but here is her hand with my future in its palm" (51). *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* describes yearning for the continual destruction of the self through love: "I want someone who will destroy and be destroyed by me" (165). The ending of the world and the lover also features in *The PowerBook* (2000): "The world ends, and you with it" (18). In *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal*, Winterson's deeply religious adoptive mother is constantly "waiting for the Apocalypse" (9) and Winterson herself remembers being "excited about the Apocalypse, because Mrs Winterson made it exciting" (23). Love is an

apocalyptic event in the relationship between mother and daughter, from the destruction of maternal love “like a bomb in the womb” (5) to Winterson telling her mother she is a lesbian in a chapter called “The Apocalypse” (100). Through Billie and Spike, queerness is endlessly destroyed and renewed. Extinction obliterates their love story only to engender different retellings of the same story. Through telling this love story, *The Stone Gods* flirts with ideas of sexual indifference and its production of a different kind of futurity beyond reproduction. Spike encourages Billie to think beyond the annihilation of the human self: “If I were to lop off your arms, your legs, your ears, your nose, put out your eyes, roll up your tongue, would you still be you?” (76). The ice age on Planet Blue demands such a dismembering of the body. Spike’s body is dismantled to conserve energy. Spike “incis[es] the skin at the top of her thigh” to amputate her legs (107), asks Billie to cut off her arms (109), “unfasten ... her chest, like a breastplate” and “detach her head from her torso,” which lies on the ground like “a piece of armour she has taken off” (111). Lovingly taken apart by Billie, Spike “sail[s] the thinking universe” because “[n]othing is solid” and “[n]othing is fixed” (111). Queer futurity is expressed through the celebration and destruction of the body.

Billie and Spike’s desire is discoverable at vast scales beyond the body. As she is about to die of cold on Planet Blue, Billie enshrines Spike as an inhuman, cosmological and geological body: “I will set you in the sky and name you. I will hide you in the earth like treasure” (112-13). Spike also imagines herself like a geological feature, as she narrates the unearthing of her dead body in a radically far off future: “One day, tens of millions of years from now, someone will find me rusted into the mud of a world they have never seen, and when they crumble me between their fingers it will be you they find” (96-97). Like a fossil, her body disintegrates and

reveals the endlessly discoverable evidence of her human lover. In a sense, Spike's fantasy of love's endurance erases her posthuman self and leaves only human remains. The discovery of Spike's rusted corpse exposes the tragedy of the Anthropocene. Winterson, writes Merola, "stages the Anthropocene as a geotraumatic and melancholy epoch" (122). Like the planet's geological body, Spike's exhumed body exposes the failure of human love. The difference and futurity symbolised by the posthuman love object disintegrates, just as more broadly, humankind's stewardship of the planet—an ecological version of love—fails in its care for the nonhuman. Winterson imagines the crumbling of love at the end of the world.

Through imagining the future discovery of her corpse, Spike describes the vast scale of deep time that underpins her and Billie's love. Billie dies for a third time at the end of the novel and places hope in another iteration of their extinction-defying romance, telling Spike, "[s]ee you in sixty-five million years, maybe" (244). Queer love becomes epochal and cyclical, punctuated by extinctions. Towards the end of Winterson's novel, Billie and Spike find an abandoned satellite dish near Wreck City receiving a "repeating code bouncing off the surface of the moon" (237). Spike deciphers the signal as "one line of programming code for a Robo *sapiens*," which is "dated" from the time of the extinction of the dinosaurs, sixty-five million years ago (240 emphasis in original). The "repeating code" is significant because it literally repeats an episode from earlier in the novel. After the asteroid collides with "Planet Blue" and eradicates the dinosaurs, Spike codes "something different—for the future": "A random repeat, bouncing off the moon" (100). The novel performs a dizzying narrative loop and implies that the code received by the satellite dish was sent by Spike millions of years ago on Planet Blue, a nascent Earth. The code is "a message in a bottle"—a symbol of desperate hope (240). As programming code, the

message is one of future possibility for Billie and Spike. With the code, another Spike might be built and another Billie might fall in love with her on another iteration Earth. *The Stone Gods* suggests another chapter in Billie and Spike's queer "archive of the heart" (175).

Although queer love is traditionally codified as non-reproductive and therefore lacking a future, *The Stone Gods* uses queerness to generate a plenitude of futures. Queerness structures the novel's central idea of an endlessly repeating world governed by cycles of love and destruction. The novel's relation to queer theory is significant because it rejects futurity and embraces extinction, but then repeatedly renews the future as a privileged site of queer love. *The Stone Gods* shifts beyond the queer refusal of a future epitomised by Edelman's conceptualisation of reproductive futurism and the symbolic tyranny of the child, and instead celebrates the "riotous future" for its seemingly endless queer possibilities (Halberstam, *Queer Time* 3). In his idea of queer utopianism, José Esteban Muñoz resists the idea put forward by the work of Bersani and Edelman, and the antisocial strand of queer theory more broadly, that heterosexuality claims futurity in advance. Instead, he insists that "queerness is primarily about futurity and hope" (*Cruising* 11) and "is always on the horizon. Indeed, for queerness to have any value whatsoever, it must be considered visible only on the horizon" ("Thinking" 825). Muñoz's rejection of queerness's present is somewhat problematic because it risks erasing queerness's current specificity. However, as a novel like *The Stone Gods* demonstrates, imagining the future of queerness—asserting that queer subjects *do* have a future—is politically momentous. A queer literary project such as Winterson's not only celebrates non-reproductive futurity with hope and possibility, but also disrupts and defers our supposed

apotheosis as human subjects. In its literary and theoretical manifestations, queerness blows the category of the human wide open.

Island of Stone: An Ecology of Extinction

“*The Stone Gods*, said the title,” reads Billie from an abandoned manuscript she finds on the London Underground. “OK, must be anthropology. Some thesis, some PhD. What’s that place with the statues? Easter Island?” (143). Billie’s discovery of the “bundle” of pages (143) furnishes the opening paragraph of the novel’s third section, “Post-3 War” (141). The found manuscript invites readers to question if they are reading the same text as Billie? She flicks through its pages and concludes that it is a “love story, that’s what it is—maybe about aliens. I hate science fiction” (143). Her reading is contextualised by the symbolism of Easter Island and the expectations of genre fiction; the manuscript is a cultural product as well as a found object, discovered like a “message in a bottle” by a lone castaway (241). The depiction of the manuscript’s discovery is organised around one of humanism’s prototypical acts: the human reader bent over a text, contemplating the world and themselves therein.

This vignette is significant because it makes the act of reading stories explicit within the novel. Moreover the manuscript, like the novel itself, tells stories of extinction. Billie interprets *The Stone Gods* as a reference to Easter Island and reads a description of someone lying beside Spike’s body “*that did not breathe*” (143 emphasis in original), which suggests that the manuscript contains the novel’s preceding narrative sections, “Planet Blue” and “Easter Island.” The manuscript, writes Sellberg, becomes “the connecting line between all the separate narratives” and through its discovery, “the lovers of the future/past come to ‘touch’ the Billie of the present, who comes to create the Billie and Spike of the future/past” through reading

(74). Winterson blurs the lines between the novel itself and its metafictional “pile of paper” twin (143). Through this postmodernist narrative flourish, reading the manuscript problematises extinction in a manner particular to text and narrative. *The Stone Gods* invites its reader to *read* extinction as a story and indeed, has its protagonist perform such a reading. As modelled by Billie, *The Stone Gods* can be read as a postmodernist pastiche of extinction stories (in the broadest sense of the term), including an anthropological study, a PhD thesis, a science fiction romance and a historical castaway tale.

However, the novel can also be read as a linear narrative of human extinction at a vast scale and spanning millions of years. In this interpretation, the four narratives “occur in a continuous temporality” (Bradway 192) whereby the story of humankind’s failed colonisation of Planet Blue is revealed to be the distant history of humans on Earth. The four narratives can be understood in chronological order, ranging from a pre-human history of Planet Blue/Earth through to a speculative future of nuclear war. Read in this way, the novel “underscores the durability of historical consequences” and emphasises the repetition of “humanity’s self-destruction” (Bradway 192). The chronological ordering is difficult because of the incomprehensible scale of reading it demands, which is reflected in the novel’s initial impression of four narratives radically out of temporal and historical sync. Read chronologically, *The Stone Gods* makes trouble for human extinction’s conventional narrative form, which hurtles sensationally toward an apocalyptic future of mass human death. Instead, Winterson offers a fictionalised and foundational history of extinction for humankind.

This human history of extinction should not come as a surprise. Given the scale of deep time and work on evolutionary biology, all species exist and evolve against unceasing histories of extinction. In the twenty-first century in particular, the

distinction between natural and anthropogenic extinction events has intensified. In this sense, Wolfe describes extinction as “the most natural thing in the world” at the same time that it is disproportionately anthropogenic and therefore unnatural (“Condors” 153). Broadly speaking, extinction is “natural” because “99.9 percent of all species that have ever existed in the history of this planet are extinct” (Wolfe 153). Garrard cites estimates that “we might be losing 27,000 species a year” but given the expense and difficulty of “proving” that a species is extinct, the real number is likely to be much higher (176; see also Kolbert 15-16; van Dooren 6).

Why does *The Stone Gods* explicitly signal its own “reading” of extinction stories? What happens if we take seriously the novel’s compelling call to “read” literary representations of extinction? In what follows, I want to explore these questions with close attention to an extinction story held at the novel’s heart, “Easter Island.” In his study of bird extinctions, van Dooren argues that storytelling provides an important way into extinction’s “complexity” and ethical implications (8): “these kinds of stories are not an attempt to obscure the truth of a situation, but to insist on a truth that is not reducible to populations and data: a fleshier, more lively, truth that in its telling might draw us into a greater sense of accountability” (10). Essentially, Winterson’s novel dramatises the idea of an extinction hypothesis, which Colebrook proposes to counter contemporary culture and critical theory’s attachment to anthropocentric ideas of life, as I discuss in Chapter Four (see also Colebrook, “Extinct” 64 and *Death* 38). Moreover, the novel draws attention to key ecological spaces in order to tell stories of extinction and the human, including Easter Island. As a site of extinction, Winterson’s Easter Island shows questions of sexual difference and indifference becoming geographical, ecological, artistic and cosmological.

Ideas of islands pervade Winteron's novel. In a repeating refrain, *The Stone Gods* encodes Easter Island, by its Polynesian name Rapanui, as a place of adventure, discovery and stories:

The new world—El Dorado, Atlantis, the Gold Coast, Newfoundland, Plymouth Rock, Rapanui, Utopia, Planet Blue. Chanc'd upon, spied through a glass darkly, drunken stories strapped to a barrel of rum, shipwreck, a Bible Compass, a giant fish led us there, a storm whirled us to this isle. In the wilderness of space, we found (8 emphasis in original; see also 62; 94; 150; 238)

As this passage shows, cultural currency overloads how stories are told about places like Easter Island. In *The Stone Gods*, Easter Island operates as an ecology of extinction. Various islands (real and metaphoric) promise refuge throughout the novel, whereas more broadly, islands are privileged sites of species precarity. The association of islands and extinction is fitting given the importance of island ecology to Charles Darwin's evolutionary thought. "The archipelago" of the Galapagos, he writes, "is a little world within itself" (44). After Darwin, the Galapagos became popularly known as a laboratory of evolution (see also Lorimer 163).

Islands play a discursive role in framing ideas of extinction and endangered species, as Garrard writes: "Island extinctions have already been extensive; now habitat destruction is also forcing mainland species into ever-diminishing ecosystems that are effectively 'islands'" (177). In the context of extinction and endangered species, the island draws attention to ecology's etymological roots in the Greek word "*oikos*: a fundamental unit, a household, a collectivising space, a gathering for people and things" (J. Cohen, "Ecology's Rainbow" xvii emphasis in original). However, through human impact on the nonhuman world, the supposedly bounded geography of

the island, along with the species it houses, is shown to be a precarious ecological space. Perhaps due to this blending of containment and precarity, islands have become invaluable settings for imagining extinction. In *The Song of the Dodo: Island Biogeography in an Age of Extinctions* (1996), David Quammen imagines the death of the last dodo on the island of Mauritius:

Imagine that she was thirty years old, or thirty-five, an ancient age for most sorts of birds She no longer ran, she waddled. ... In the dark of an early morning in 1667, say, during a rainstorm, she took cover beneath a cold stone ledge She drew her head down against her body, fluffed her feathers for warmth, squinted in patient misery. She waited. She didn't know it, nor did anyone else, but she was the only dodo on Earth. When the storm passed, she never opened her eyes. This is extinction. (275)

With an extraordinary sense of loss and tragedy, this “imaginative lament” and “elegy” for a bird synonymous with extinction illustrates how island extinctions acquire global significance (Garrard 177). The dodo, as van Dooren puts it, “has taken on a strange celebrity, becoming something of a ‘poster child’ for extinction” (1). The human becomes implicated in Quammen’s imagining of the last dodo, through a sense of accountability and the heartbreaking affect produced by the story. Feminised, ancient and alone, this story of the dodo’s extinction represents a symbolic failure of care on the part of humankind. Quammen’s “fiction” of extinction draws its reader into a mournful sense of humankind’s ethical obligation to its nonhuman others.

Like the dodo, Easter Island is a symbol of extinction and plays a significant role in *The Stone Gods*. Billie is reimagined as Billy, a male British sailor in the eighteenth century who is abandoned by his ship on Easter Island. Winterson “rewrites” Captain Cook’s historical encounter with the indigenous people of

Polynesia (Bradway 191). In Winterson's version, the depiction of the devastated island accompanies the love story of Billy and Spikkers, a man of Dutch and Polynesian parentage. Warring religious factions have razed the island landscape and harvested it of trees to build the novel's titular stone gods. Billy's abandonment on the island is the novel's "central event, taking on an almost allegorical role" (Sellberg 68). The island comes to illustrate a familiar narrative of the human in the twenty-first century and the Anthropocene: humankind as a destructive and world-changing species that "could use up a whole world" (Winterson 133).

The Stone Gods crafts Easter Island as a space of extinction through depicting the "deadened land" (133) of "this dismal island" (122). The British crew expects "only ... abundance" from Easter Island, which yields "nothing of the green luxury" of Australia and New Zealand (118). As an ecology in ruin, the "barren place" of the island defies the expectations of European exploration and dreams of the verdant new world: "Hardly to be understood is the lack of vegetation" (120). Winterson seems to juxtapose the dearth of plants with the richness of symbolism on the island: "It is as if, here, everything signifies some other thing: ... the Stone Gods, even the island, even the world are symbols for what they are not" (136). The "good land" of the island is "destroyed" and "sacrificed" to human destructiveness (136), but then enlivened through its symbolic expansiveness. The island is imaginatively remade through queer love. Billy's love for Spikkers has "shrunk this pod of an island further and made [their] cave an everywhere" (138), like a reflection of Winterson's broader reconstruction of the love story of Billie/Billy and Spike/Spikkers.

Life and death on the island is associated with birds in Winterson's novel. Birds play a significant role in work on island extinctions and are utilised like a case study for the precarity of the nonhuman world in an age of extinction. For example,

while only twenty percent of bird species live on islands, around ninety percent of extinct bird species were endemic to islands (Garrard 177; Quammen 264; van Dooren 6). Winterson's Easter Island imaginatively blurs the distinction between humans and birds, which "were once abundant here, like fishes and trees and water, and their departure is the anger of the gods" (134). As his ship sails away, Billy shouts and petrels "shrieked in return and widened their wings to welcome [him]" as if he is "of their kind" (119). The island's warring tribes have bird-like leaders: a "Bird Man" chieftain with avian "talons" (126) and a feathered "White Man" who is said to "fly with the Dead" (130). Spikkers competes for the Bird Man title in an annual "Egg Race" up sea cliffs to collect "the first Egg laid by the visiting Sooty Terns" (134). On the barren island, the egg is a potent reproductive symbol of life. Eggs keep the rats alive (120) but also signify the ecological regeneration of the island. Winning the egg, Spikkers believes, "will end the destruction": "The trees will grow and the birds will return" (135). Birds do return, but as emblems of Spikkers' death. *The Stone Gods* ultimately subverts the egg's promise of reproduction, renewal and futurity. Spikkers falls from the cliffs during the Egg Race and dies, like a "white bird open[ing] its wings" (140) and recalling Billy's earlier description of the human soul as "an albatross or frigate-bird" (131). Queer love is, yet again for Winterson, extinguished.

The representation of Easter Island's famous stone statues is central to the novel's interest in extinction. As the title suggests, *The Stone Gods* is fascinated with these monolithic sculptures. Carved from stone, the sculptures signify the island as a place defined by materiality and overdetermined with cultural meaning. Cohen observes that philosophy has long relied upon stone to "metonymically" stand in "for the obduracy of all matter" to such an extent that stone signifies "the world in its

givenness” (*Stone* 31). Stone is employed by philosophical thought to organise the human understanding of the materiality of the world. In her work on the vibrancy of matter, Bennett describes how humans gravitate to reductive interpretations of the material world defined by fixity: “noun or adjective *material* denotes some stable or rock-bottom reality, something adamantine” (58 emphasis in original). When Billie reads the found manuscript on the Underground, she immediately recognises in the title a place defined by its iconic materiality (143). Easter Island’s statues and its “stripped and bare” landscape (118) have come to signify an iconic story of humankind’s destructive relationship with nature and the inevitability of extinction. For example, Jared Diamond popularises this story in his bestselling historical work, *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Survive* (2005). He describes “the collapse of Easter Island society as a metaphor, a worst-case scenario, for what may lie ahead of us in our own future” (119). As critics have noted, Diamond uses the island “as a parable for our current global environmental crisis” (Hunt and Lipo 601), in which the island’s people are “resuscitated only to become representatives of the rest of the earth’s population heading into self-destruction” (Haun 254). For Diamond, the global story of extinction encapsulated by the island assumes an Ozymandian scale. The “monumental ruins” of an extinct society are a “romantic mystery,” which for Diamond, seem to ventriloquise Percy Bysshe Shelley across time: “Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!” (Diamond 3).

There is an important tension at work here in the relationship between stone and the human. Stone challenges humankind’s parochial self-interest; Cohen insists that stone “offers a stumbling block to anthropocentrism and a spur to ceaseless story” (*Stone* 6). Stone’s inhuman scales of deep, geological time derange the comparably miniscule scales of human history and storytelling. In its narrative compulsion,

however, humankind has recognised and sought to co-opt stone's inscriptive potential: stone functions as "our shorthand for temporal density and strange intrusion" (*Stone* 35). This recognition has reached its apotheosis in the Anthropocene with humankind's "discovery" of its own story embedded in the earth. As Cohen writes, "the earth possesses numerous recording devices, repositories for nonlinguistic inscription, an indigenous but hard lithic poetics" (*Stone* 35). The human seeks confirmation of its "milieu of extinction" in the nonhuman world (Colebrook, "Sexual" 172), where stone functions as the privileged medium of the human's inhuman expression: "Although tree rings and ice cores yield tales of ancient pollen, glaciation, and aerial chemistry, stone's archival force endures far longer" (Cohen, *Stone* 35).

The idea of stone as an archive is particularly relevant to *The Stone Gods* and its thematic interest in extinction, climate change and the Anthropocene. The twinning of aesthetics and materiality implicates not only the geological archive contained by the statues but their function as art objects. This stone is cultivated: quarried and crafted within the narrative world, but also constructed through representation to do particular work. Artful stone unites the Anthropocene's dual narratives of a world in decay and a destructive human species: "If art is now a practice condemned to a *homolithic earth*—that is, to a world 'going to pieces' as the literal sediment of human activity—how can aesthetic practices address the social and political spheres that are being set in stone?" (Davis and Turpin 3 emphasis in original). Stone's inhuman aesthetics brim with narrative and boast what Roger Caillois describes as an "almost menacing perfection" (3). The art of stone and the meaning it constructs can be imagined as a form of deep cultural inscription. Anthropocentrism creeps in through the "lapidary" allure of stone and its production of "wonder and desire" in the

human (Caillois 3). Stone provokes a fascination for a world beyond the human but also, through the Anthropocene, a world that is intimately part of the human's narrative urge.

In this manner, Winterson's statues conceal a particular human story. Winterson's depiction of stone is domesticated to narrate a story of racial conflict and ecological destruction. These stone gods capitalise on what Beverley Haun describes as a central aspect to "the imagined Easter Island that circulate[s] in our [Western] culture: the iconic statues of the moai" (4; see also Fischer 33-37). Western culture's romantic fixation on the moai statues performs discursive violence:

in this construction of Easter Island ... the moai have become separated from other possible traces of the island's cultural identity. The people, known as Rapanui, have been allowed to fade while the trace of the moai has been strengthened through appropriation, repetition, and distortion as a trope within Euro-American culture. (Haun 4)

Western thought imagines the moai statues shrugging off their cultural specificity and creative emergence from a non-white history. They have become colonised symbols of extinction and human extinguishment.

The Stone Gods layers the statues with enigma, blankness and uncertain meaning. Although part of a British imperialistic voyage of discovery (131), Billy is neutered of colonial power on the island. Abandoned by the crew of Captain Cook's *Resolution* after a violent encounter between the British and Polynesians (119), Billy explores the island without the masculine verve of British imperialism. His thoughts are nostalgic, for "Lemon Curd" (121) and his lost lover (123). This sense of domesticity and human intimacy stands in stark contrast to the inhuman art of the statues. They are "strange and silent ... dark and heavy and impassive" (124) with

“piles of human bones, like an open grave” at their feet (125). The narrative suggests that the statues function as part of the island’s funerary rituals and as Cohen notes, stone has a long association with “memorials and grave markers” (*Stone* 35). The bones signify a diminishing human population and recall Billy’s fear that “Cannibals” might inhabit the island (120). Billy’s disgust at cannibalism’s savage meal likens non-white cannibals to rats, who both receive nourishing “contentment” from “human remains” (120). The association of race with forbidden consumption practices and nonhuman vermin illustrates Western humanism’s willingness to locate the human’s destructive tendencies elsewhere: in non-white bodies and in the far-flung geography of the Pacific Ocean.

The open grave also exposes a posthumanist affinity between human bone and stone. The novel’s “Monuments or Idols” represent stone as malleable matter and amenable to the human’s artistic drive (117). However, pairing the statues with bone suggests what Bennett describes as “the perspective of evolutionary rather than biographical time” for both human and rock—the time frame at which “a mineral efficacy becomes visible” (10-11). “Mineralization,” writes Bennett, “names the creative agency by which bone was produced” (11). Nonhuman geology intrudes in the evolutionary history of animal life, as Manuel de Landa explains: “soft tissue (gels and aerosols, muscle and nerve) reigned supreme until 500 million years ago. At that point, some of the conglomerations of fleshy matter-energy that made up life underwent a sudden *mineralization*, and a new material for constructing living creatures emerged: bone” (26 emphasis in original). The cultural significance of stone almost seems to suggest humankind’s evolutionary recognition of its own mineral history, leading the species to attach, bury and mark itself with stone in the face of extinction. As de Landa writes, despite bone’s essential role in complex animal life,

bone “never forg[ets] its mineral origins: it is the living material that most easily petrifies, that most readily crosses the threshold back into the world of rocks” (27). In terms of their evolutionary emergence, humans seem to recognise a subcutaneous archive of posthumanist self-discovery in the geological.

Cohen describes such an imbrication of human and stone as “geophilia”: “a pull, a movement, and a conjoint creativity that breaches ontological distance” (*Stone* 19). Geophilia names a “love of stone” that is fundamentally queer in its posthumanist critique of the integrity of human self-definition (Cohen 19). It is the “[m]onstrous child of the meeting of incompatible scales, queer progeny of impossible taxonomic breach, ... the lithic in the creaturely and the lively in the stone” (20). Winterson’s depiction of the statues participates in the novel’s posthumanist critique of the human. The statues stand “staring out to sea with their massy stone faces” (124). They are an “eerie sight” to behold: “their smooth backs to the sea, their unseeing eyes fixed on the inland” (133). The statues’ eeriness is entwined with their indexation and deprivation of the human sensorium. Their strange silence (124), traditionally one of stone’s central symbolic meanings (Cohen 16), seems to promise a hidden story. Their “unseeing eyes” are carved out of nonhuman stone, which connects the creation of the statues with the fabrication of Spike’s robotic human form from plastic, metal and circuitry. The stone gods maintain a seaward outlook and a “fixed” gaze upon the island’s interior as if through the precision of sight. As inhuman art, their narrative depiction is couched in what Wolfe describes as “the dream of mastery troped as vision” (*Animal* 5). The statues represent a stony approximation of the human’s primary avenues for experiencing and changing the world: vision and language. The statues thereby implicate the human into the inorganic, nonhuman world and not only through their sculptural anthropomorphism.

As I discuss in Chapter Four, Wolfe excavates a “critical genealogy” of the senses and demonstrates how “the figure of vision is indeed ineluctably tied to the specifically human” (*Animal* 3; see also *Posthumanism* 133-34). Vision is fundamental to the human subject’s mastery of its surroundings, and central to the organisational distinction between human subject and nonhuman object in the visual field. The witnessing gaze of the statues disturbs this relation between human and nonhuman. The unseeing, nonhuman and inorganic eyes of the statues “see” something that the novel’s human characters cannot comprehend.

The statues are like radically posthumanist subjects. Their silence and strange vision prompt questioning: to what do they turn their gaze when they stare at the ocean and the island? What stories might they tell if they were to break their lithic silence? In a readily historicised manner, such a gaze and the narrative it could lead to is already compromised by the imaginative imposition of Winterson’s novel. Haun’s scholarship on Easter Island is helpful here. She examines European pictorial representations of Easter Island and its statues, with an eighteenth-century Dutch example proving to be ubiquitous. The frontispiece illustration of a book entitled *Tweejaarige Reyze rondom de wereld* (1728, translated into English as *The Two Years Journey*) depicts the European approach to the island. Spear-wielding savages populate the beach and white men fire rifles at them from longboats. In the background to this scene of colonial conflict looms one of the moai statues, facing out to sea (see Haun 72). Haun argues that this image, along with written accounts,

like those that follow from future explorers, forcefully demonstrate the constructed nature of the island in the European record. Like so many future depictions of moai, this illustration shows a statue facing out to sea, when, in

fact, they all face inward looking over the parcel of clan settlement whose fertility they are positioned to enhance. (73 my emphasis)

Western culture's misrepresentation of Easter Island ignores the true spatial orientation of the statues. Winterson's titular gods look both inward over the island and outward over the Pacific, contrary to their actual orientation as described by Haun. This doubled gaze proves dynamic for the novel's navigation of the human. The statues look seaward as if the island was always awaiting the arrival of European exploration and the racial violence of humanism, with its discriminatory distribution of human worth. Through their inland gaze, however, the statues perform a symbolic role of witness to the island's waning ecological fertility and reproductive potential. By looking inland, the statues also avert their gaze from the fertility of the ocean, which the novel aligns with birth and the maternal body (146-47). The statues witness extinction's unfolding, contrary to Europe's entrenched view that they must be firmly geared towards white liberal humanism's arrival in the Antipodes.

“Cast Out Farm”: A Queer Return to Nature

“It's you, and it's me, and I knew it would end like this,” concludes Billie from beyond the grave. At the novel's close, Billie dies yet again but continues to narrate an epilogue of sorts. It depicts a sentimental reunion of a couple, presumed to be Billie and Spike given their recurrence across the novel. It is not only a romantic reunion but also a return to “Cast Out Farm” (48), Billie's Arcadian property from earlier in the novel. The farm is an enclosed ecological refuge, “a bio-dome world, secret and sealed” from “this hi-tech, hi-stress, hi-mess life” (13). Like “a message in a bottle from another time” (13), the farm represents a contained space of verdant “pastureland” populated by roaming cattle and “woodland belts ... with branches

thick with birds” (13). It is an unruly, pastoral island of “rough fences,” “uneven ground,” “tussocks of grass” and “uncultivated hedge and verge” (14). This is verdancy as natural excess and habitat, filled with a catalogue of “burrows, tunnels, nests, tree-hollows, wasp-balls, drilled-out holes of the water voles, otter sticks, toad stones, mice riddling the dry-stone walls, badger sets, molehills, fox dens, rabbit warrens” (14). The farm’s agricultural potential is worthless to “a world that clones its meat in a lab and engineers its crops underground” (9). The idyllic depiction of thriving plant and animal life serves another purpose.

The farm marks Billie as odd, representing nostalgia for a mode of human life long gone. Its hyperbolic greenery signifies a natural and sustainable world that is extinct, with Cast Out Farm’s “bio-bubble” (9) and its “simple life” philosophy (10) relegated to the status of a bizarre artefact “leased” to Billie from a “Living Museum” (9). This characterisation of the farm constructs Billie as a kind of queer outsider for her outmoded connection with the natural world. In this sense, the farm reinscribes the traditional link between women and the natural world, and the idea of women as custodians of nature. Moreover, the farm is also a symbolic return to the refuge of the plenitude of the mother’s body. Billie remembers being in the womb as her mother eats watercress from a stream and “everything inside goes green” (156). “This is our house,” her mother says to her, as they arrive at “an old stone farmhouse, built on the drop to the stream” (156). The epilogue disrupts the novel’s representation of humankind’s estrangement from nature, as Bradway writes: “Billie reads as ‘queer’ to others because of her sentimentality, not her lesbianism. Billie’s sentimentality represents her melancholic attachment to a human past that has been disavowed in favour of techno-futurism” (194). Winterson’s queer futurity takes an atavistic turn: Cast Out Farm is “the last of its line—like an ancient ancestor everyone forgot” (13).

Turning from the future, *The Stone Gods* finds another kind of queer possibility beyond death and extinction.

CHAPTER SIX

Neohumanism and the Queer Posthuman: David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*

"I watched clouds awobbly from the floor o' that kayak," recounts Zachry Bailey in David Mitchell's popular literary novel *Cloud Atlas* (2004). Bailey deciphers a transcendent form of human subjectivity in the skies above him: "Souls cross ages like clouds cross skies, an' tho' a cloud's shape nor hue nor size don't stay the same it's still a cloud an' so is a soul. Who can say where the cloud's blowed from or who the soul'll be 'morrow?" (324). This oft-cited quotation (see for example Childs and Green, "Novels" 35; Eaglestone 97; Machinal 147; McCulloch 162; O'Donnell 79) is central to the novel's representation of the human, which sees iterations of humanity repeating across history, genres, texts and bodies to form an insistently and recurrently human whole. The novel thus imagines true human identity through nonhuman imagery; clouds, together with metaphors of water and comets, reflect a transcendent human identity unrestricted by bodily materiality.

This poetic co-opting of the nonhuman world raises the following question: what exactly is being mapped by the novel's "atlas o' clouds" (324)? What does this popular and critically acclaimed novel have to say about the human? As my examination of the novel makes clear, *Cloud Atlas* is a conscious intervention in posthumanism's theoretical project. This chapter examines this intervention through a detailed explication of the novel's depiction of human consumption practices, non-reproductive sexuality and Anthropocene futurity. My reading of the novel therefore concentrates on its two innermost futuristic narratives: a story of human cloning in a dystopian Korea and a tale of survival on a post-apocalyptic Hawaii. *Cloud Atlas*'s intervention in posthumanism only partially succeeds; however, its failures reveal

important characteristics of posthumanism and its attendant figure of the posthuman. In particular, *Cloud Atlas*'s critique of the human also embraces a more conservative mode of the human, which I describe as neohumanist. In this sense the novel epitomises Badmington's assertion, and the grounding conviction of this thesis, that theory and fiction are both essential to posthumanism's critique of the human ("Posthumanism," *Routledge Companion* 376).

As I describe throughout this thesis, the Anthropocene and anthropogenic climate change have redefined humans as a geological and nonhuman global entity. Redefining humankind in this way, writes Chakrabarty, means "scal[ing] up our imagination of the human" ("Climate of History" 206) and confronting the fact that "the wall between human and natural history has been breached" (221). However this rescaling of the human "entails a disconcerting *de-politicization*," as Clark explains:

The would-be progressive understanding of recent centuries of human history as the advance of human freedoms through various peoples' struggle for rights comes also to be seen, less heroically, as a phenomenon of natural history, namely of a species experiencing a boom in numbers, possibilities, and in some cases at least, in liberties and security, through the discovery of vast resources of fossil fuels. (*Ecocriticism* 13 emphasis in original)

By reinscribing the human at a gargantuan scale, the Anthropocene threatens to eradicate the significance of a whole range of human differences including gender, race, sexuality, disability, class and so on. Ben Dibley describes the Anthropocene as haunted by a nostalgia for a more traditional version of the human, and writes that the Anthropocene "is a formulation that would seem to be shadowed by a longing for that which its emergence signals is lost: Man and Nature" (142). Effectively, the scale

effects of the Anthropocene undermine efforts to expand the category of the human to be more inclusive.

Chakrabarty recognises that de-politicising the human in the Anthropocene is a significant problem, because “climate change poses for us a question of a human collectivity, an us, pointing to a figure of the universal that escapes our capacity to experience the world” (“Climate of History” 222). The impacts of climate change and the Anthropocene are “uneven” and “routed through all our ‘anthropological differences’” (“Postcolonial” 14; see also Lorimer 3), which Chakrabarty discusses in terms of the intersection of climate change and capitalist history (“Climate of History” 212-220). Writing as a postcolonial historian, Chakrabarty admits that the “idea of the human needs to be stretched beyond where postcolonial thought advanced it” (15). For Chakrabarty, the politics of identity—the hard-won contours of specific human differences—are inescapably warped by the scale of the Anthropocene. The challenge of the Anthropocene demands viewing “the human simultaneously on contradictory registers,” as Chakrabarty puts it: “as a geophysical force and as a political agent, as a bearer of rights and as author of actions; subject to both the stochastic forces of nature (being itself one such force collectively) and open to the contingency of individual human experience; belonging at once to differently-scaled histories of the planet, of life and species, and of human societies” (“Postcolonial” 14). It is increasingly apparent that ideas of scale pose some of the most significant problems for understanding the human in the Anthropocene.

Cloud Atlas refuses to commit to the Anthropocene’s radical decentring of the human subject as a nonhuman agent. Mitchell’s text retains a pervasive sense of the human’s normative intensity. It displays a neohumanist return to tropes of Enlightenment humanism and a revitalisation of the normative human subject. The

novel thus demonstrates the anthropocentric bias inherent to the Anthropocene, which enshrines the possibility of human legibility in a future after human extinction has occurred. What we call “the human” becomes, for the novel but also for critiques of the human more broadly, a site of volatility and affirmation. In this way, *Cloud Atlas* queers the human but also reinstalls a more traditional version of the human.

My reading of *Cloud Atlas*, like the other textual analyses offered by this thesis, is underpinned by two interwoven senses of queerness. As I demonstrate across the chapters of this thesis, the figure of the posthuman brings together queerness’s more familiar place in gendered and sexual identity formation as well as the expanding significance of queerness in the nonhuman turn. In this first sense, Chen thinks of queerness “in terms of the social and cultural formations of ‘improper affiliation,’ so that queerness might well describe an array of subjectivities, intimacies, beings, and spaces located outside of the heteronormative” (104). In the second sense, Luciano and Chen are drawn to critiques of the human from foundational texts of queer theory, which interrogate “how sexual norms themselves constitute and regulate hierarchies of humanness, and as they work to unsettle those norms and the default forms of humanness they uphold” (186). Giffney and Hird use queerness “to unpick binaries and reread gaps, silences and in-between spaces” pertaining to the border between the human and the nonhuman world (5). Queering is crucial, writes Haraway, to unravelling the normative categories established and perpetuated by the human/nonhuman divide (“Mis-recognition” xxiv). Posthuman queerness disturbs the certainties of anthropocentrism and produces different imaginaries for the human and its place in the more-than-human world.

Jonathan Boulter rightly observes that “[a]ny consideration of *Cloud Atlas* must begin with the novel’s structure” (130). The novel employs a frequently

analysed structure of “nested narratives” (Childs and Green, “Novels” 35; O’Donnell 74) resembling a “Russian doll” (Eaglestone 96; Hopf 109; Ng 107; O’Donnell 75) or “Chinese box” (Bayer 348; McMorran 163; O’Donnell 74). These narratives include the nineteenth-century journal of American lawyer Adam Ewing sailing across the Pacific; a collection of letters written by young composer Robert Frobisher in the 1930s near Bruges; a 1970s pulp fiction thriller about Californian journalist Luisa Rey’s investigation into an energy corporation; and a contemporary farce about ageing publisher Timothy Cavendish trapped in a British retirement home. With the fifth and sixth stories, the narrative shifts into a speculative future and features the interrogation of Sonmi-451, a human clone bred for service in a brave new South Korea, and the story of Zachry Bailey’s escape from a post-apocalyptic Hawaii ravaged by tribal warfare, constructed as part of an oral storytelling tradition. Bailey’s story sits unbroken at the novel’s centre, encased on either side by the two halves of stories one to five.

Each story is sequentially absorbed into the one that follows it so that each story appears to consume its predecessor, thus invoking the theme of predacity that pervades Mitchell’s fiction more broadly (see Begley): the islanders gather about a recording of Sonmi-451’s testimony, believing her to be a god; Sonmi-451 watches a film of Cavendish’s ordeal, which in turn features Cavendish reading a book manuscript of the 1970s thriller; and Rey discovers Frobisher’s letters, wherein Frobisher describes reading Ewing’s journal. The novel draws attention to the artifice of its internal texts and emphasises “a politics of epistemology” (Hayles, “RFID” 50). The “authenticity” of each story is placed under duress, with each section recast as a different kind of constructed cultural product: an edited journal, a collection of letters, a book manuscript, a film, a holographic recording, and an oral narrative. In this

respect, *Cloud Atlas* shares a postmodern self-awareness of its own literary construction with Winterson's *The Stone Gods* (2007), which explicitly reflects upon its composition as a science fiction romance, a work of anthropology, a PhD thesis and an historical castaway tale.

Courtney Hopf explains *Cloud Atlas*'s structure with a metaphor of consumption: "The movement in this novel is not, as it first appears, a teleological movement forward in time toward apocalypse, but rather the gradual consumption over time of different media of expression—letters eat diary, novel eats letters, film eats novel, and so on" (119). Will McMorran also recognises the fitness of this "metaphor of narratological consumption and predacity" (165). Rey not only reads Frobisher's letters but "inhales" them: "*Are molecules ... of Robert Frobisher's hand ... swirling in my lungs, now, in my blood?*" (453 emphasis in original). Peter Childs and James Green read this as exemplary of a "blending of narrative and subjectivity" through "narrative transmission" (*Aesthetics* 151). However, Childs and Green overlook the passage's suggestion of a cannibalistic consumption of bodies, as well as what Paul Ferguson describes as the more "formal cannibalism" of the novel's structure (146).

Lynda Ng observes the hybrid success of the novel: "[i]t was an unexpected crossover hit, winning critical acclaim and also finding popular appeal" (107; see also Squires 171-75), as well as attracting growing interest from the academy. It has been labelled a "contemporary masterpiece" (Clayton 58), a "globetrotting novel of ideas" (McMorran 156), an "ambitious experiment" (Hopf 108) and "too clever for its own good" (Mezey 14). Fredric Jameson interprets the novel as a ubiquitous "history of imprisonments" (311) and similarly Gerd Bayer is convinced by the novel's "idea of simultaneity" in exploring shared "questions of globalization, terrorism, and

reappraisal. I argue that the novel depicts the posthuman as a fundamentally queer presence. In so doing, the text displays a devout interest in what Patrick O'Donnell describes as “those forms of cultural violence that attempt to install a homogenous regime of ‘the human’” (70). As I demonstrate in this chapter, these “forms of cultural violence”—specifically, compulsory reproductive futures, consumption practices and the Anthropocene—not only dramatise the posthuman and posthumanism in important ways but also reinstall a stabilising human order.

In justifying their decision to focus on the nonhuman over the posthuman, Giffney and Hird are wary of the posthuman and posthumanism's potential to harbour normative remnants of the human and humanism (3-4). Other scholars share similar concerns. Weinstein and Colebrook tire of what they describe as the posthuman's “inevitable reuptake of the human vestiges that the post- is meant to surpass,” and Badmington writes that a rigorous posthumanist critique must be cognizant of “the *possibility* that humanism will haunt or taint posthumanism ... a problem of what remains” (“Theorizing” 12 emphasis in original). I am fascinated by the potential for the posthuman and posthumanism to instantiate normative ideas of the human. In particular, I am interested in the complicity of novels of the posthuman in producing this normative framework of the human. Fictions ostensibly committed to a radical exploration of posthuman subjectivity may, finally, usher in revitalised versions of the traditional human subject.

From this position, it seems undeniable that the posthuman “remains a human question” in no small way, as Weinstein and Colebrook argue. As a critical framework enacting rhetorical manoeuvres familiar to theories of the postmodern and postmodernism, posthumanism is conceptually mired in humanism and its legacy (see Clarke, *Posthuman* 2; Herbrechter 16; Wolfe, *Posthumanism* xv). As such,

posthumanism does not come “after” the so-called death of the human as a historicised product of Western liberal humanism, and nor do the fictions of the posthuman examined in this thesis abandon the human. For Wolfe, overcoming the human (as some popular interpretations of the posthuman initiate) is anathema to rigorous posthumanist theory (*Posthumanism* xv). Posthumanism, for Wolfe, must remain an intensely human question, but with a radically expanded critique of its human subject. For Colebrook, posthumanism remains too anthropocentric. She argues that posthumanism is a form of “ultra-humanism” (“Who” 226), which installs a subject position at once exceptional, in its supposed reaction against a standard definition of the human, and self-erasing, in its slippery refusal to be bound by any standard form (221).

Cloud Atlas epitomises this tension at the heart of posthumanist theory: between fantasies of posthumanism and the posthuman on one hand and a humanist resurgence of the normative human on the other. In this way, Mitchell’s novel capitalises on anxieties over the pressures applied to the human by critical theory. I contend that the novel is an exemplary fiction of the posthuman precisely because of its posthumanist failings. These failures tell “human” stories and reveal a dynamic exchange between posthumanist theory and contemporary fiction. As Mitchell’s novel invites us to think at grand scales beyond the human (temporally, historically, materially), it restabilises itself upon a conservative human scale organised by heterosexual romance and a return to liberal humanism. In other words, concurrent with *Cloud Atlas*’s posthuman and posthumanist inclinations is an anthropic irony: that in thinking beyond the human we meet ourselves yet again, as the neohumanist arbiters to the all-too-human scales of narrative, agency and intimacy.

Meat Market: Human Consumption and Posthuman Sex

“I dreamt of a ... nightmarish café,” recalls the European composer Vyvyan Ayrs in the novel’s second section (80). As an example of how *Cloud Atlas*’s distinct narrative parts interconnect, the dream signals the novel’s fifth section. “An Orison of Sonmi-451” tells the story of a clone’s escape from the subhuman working class of Nea So Copros (a futuristic Korea). Cloned slave labour serves a range of industries and Sonmi-451 works in a subterranean fast-food restaurant. In Ayrs’s dream, the café is “brilliantly lit, but underground, with no way out. ... The waitresses all had the same face. The food was soap, the only drink was cups of lather” (80). This vignette is telling for how it positions posthuman bodies: institutionally constrained, servile and gendered. Furthermore, such bodies populate a place of food and eating. As we later discover, these cloned “fabricants” eat “soap” and “lather,” an unpalatable meal associated with cleanliness, purity, discipline and the body as well as one of soap’s more traditional ingredients: animal fat (189). This association foreshadows the fate of fabricants to be killed and turned into clone soap and meat for the “nightmarish” fast-food industry.

This representation of posthuman bodies is a focal point for the novel’s exploration of human consumption practices and heterosexuality, and their interrelation. The bodies of posthuman others destabilise the normative intensity of the human through their construction as both objects of edible matter and heteronormative desire. Thus, posthuman bodies signify predacity and vulnerability as well as excessive material and ontological difference. In this respect, *Cloud Atlas* participates in a broader trend in contemporary fiction that pairs posthuman bodies with anxieties of consumption, reflecting broader cultural concerns in the twenty-first century about humankind’s accountability and ethical obligations to other forms of

life. For example, I have already considered the organ-donating students of Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) and the horrors of human livestock in Faber's *Under the Skin* (2000), and we could add to this the dangerously hungry robotic Doves of Gee's *The Ice People* (1998).

Herbrechter and Callus's sense of posthuman otherness is useful for reading this trend. They argue that the excluded posthuman other "steals upon" and "haunts" humanism's "universalist, liberal, essentialist, individualist" human subject (97). Posthuman otherness, which runs the full gamut from nonhuman animals to God, represents "the anxieties and desires involved in the process of drawing boundaries around the human and what may, or may not, be natural to it" (96). *Cloud Atlas* depicts posthuman bodies marked by diminished capabilities and wasted forms, threatening only through their disruption of normative categories and hierarchies. In doing so the novel inadvertently aligns itself with Butler's description of "less-than-human" forms of life (*Undoing* 2) by which humanist history "maintain[s] certain exclusionary conceptions of who is normatively human" (*Precarious* xiv-xv). The cloned body is biopolitically expendable; it is killable on a mass scale and does not attract the grief assigned to valuable life (see Butler, *Precarious* 34).

The clones of *Cloud Atlas* represent an exemplary posthuman otherness. They are not only simulacra of human life, but also non-white bodies of physical disability and animality—attributes that Wolfe identifies as fundamental to contemporary posthumanism's genealogy (*Animal* 104; *Posthumanism* 127), as I outline in Chapter One. Sonmi-451's story is a confession, which she tells to an official "Archivist" before her execution (187). She describes how she gained sentience and joined a rebellion against the powerful status quo. Her "ascension" from unthinking servility to consciousness marks the development of a rights-based ethics and politics, spatially

reflected in her “ascension” from the underground café to the aboveground freedom of “Outside” (191, 208). This idea of ascension harks back to Plato’s Allegory of the Cave, in which a prisoner’s ascent from subterranean darkness to the world above reflects the philosopher’s passage from ignorance to knowledge (Plato 242). The Allegory also anticipates notions of the Cartesian humanist subject. It is the story of ourselves as the inheritors of rational thought, “forcibly dragged up the steep and rugged ascent ... into the sunlight” of reason (Plato 242). It charts the triumph of the human mind over the earthly conditions of the body. But for Plato, the point is not to escape these conditions but to understand them. The philosopher “must therefore descend in turn and live with [their] fellows in the cave and get used to seeing in the dark” (247). Like Kathy H in *Never Let Me Go*, Sonmi-451’s storytelling represents her elevation from less-than-human worker to knowledgeable narrator within the humanist form of the novel—a form that cannot save either woman.

Despite this humanist ascension, Sonmi-451’s vulnerable body continually marks her as posthuman and therefore expendable. The novel frequently emphasises her disabled form compared to able-bodied humans, as if a human simulacrum must necessarily be a weakened echo of its original. She struggles to climb a staircase, fighting “gravity for the first time” with “vertigo” and “clumsiness” marking her a fabricant “specimen” rather than a human (211). Other characters insist on carrying her up and down staircases (215-16; 329; see also 208). A university student muses that “[i]t must be hell ... to have an intelligent mind trapped in such an inferior body” (232). This reiteration of the Cartesian unit summarises Sonmi-451’s predicament as a posthuman defined by her body, whilst also demonstrating the importance of the Cartesian split to liberal humanism itself. The liberal humanist subject must be in happy possession of a rational mind in control of an obedient body (and by extension,

the world laid passively before them), a condition to which Sonmi-451 cannot lay claim.

Nea So Copros sustains itself through the human's institutionalised exploitation and consumption of disabled posthuman bodies. Sonmi-451's political aims crystallise with the spectacle of cloned bodies harvested of their flesh. As Sonmi-451 joins the rebellious political group Union, her lover Hae-Joo Im shows her the grisly horrors aboard a "golden ark" (357). Sonmi-451, like her fellow fabricants, believes the mythical ship transports fabricants to their paradisiacal retirement on Hawaii (358). It is worth noting here the recurrence of island fantasies and escapes to bounded geographies in recent posthuman fictions, as well as in literary culture more broadly. Examples include Michael Bay's film *The Island* (2005), where indentured clones dream of "the last remaining paradise" of the island. Similarly Winterson's novel *The Stone Gods* deploys the island as a symbol of refuge for a same-sex human-robot relationship whilst also using Easter Island to allegorise human extinction.

The Hawaii of *Cloud Atlas* is no Eden; the golden ship no luxury vessel. The ship is a "dreamlike" abattoir holding hundreds of singing fabricants (358). Like animals, they are "processed" through "turnstiles" (357) as "their music interw[eaves] with background hydraulics" (358). The interconnection between fabricant music and the mechanised hydraulics of the ship recalls a previous description of fabricants as the "ultimate organic machinery" (341). It becomes clear that Sonmi-451 is observing a "slaughterhouse production line" (359). However the novel emphasises not just their nonhuman animalness but also their precarious "human" status as the scene evokes images of dehumanised people led to their death during the Holocaust.

Thus, the construction of fabricants as biopolitical capital draws upon their ontological proximity to both the human and the nonhuman. The novel relishes its

depiction of such ethical horror. With “abject gratitude” (Mezey 25), fabricants are taken into a “holding pen” to ostensibly remove the collars that mark their servitude (Mitchell, *Cloud* 358). Bolts punch through their skulls and their freshly killed bodies are winched along the production line, “corpse[s] tapdanc[ing]” with “smile[s] frozen in death” (359). The abattoir is characterised by “blood-soaked” bodily excess to pare away the integrity of each animalised body: “The devils down there snipped off collars, stripped clothes, shaved follicles, peeled skin, offcut hands and legs, sliced off meat, spooned organs ... Drains hoovered the blood ... the noise was colossal” (359). Like the hydraulics of the “slaughtership” (362), fabricant bodies are an integral part of Nea So Copros’s brutal economy. This economic structure relies on a capitalistic violence that thrives in the biopolitical grey area of species division. Fabricants become “animal capital” as theorised by Shukin, who details the ruthlessly “posthuman” effects of certain aspects of capitalism, which permit species boundaries to be blurred, crossed and redefined in the pursuit of capital (11). Fabricants are precluded from, and defined in opposition to, the status and rights of human “purebloods” (362). They are less-than-human livestock and productive of biopolitical excess: stripped of subject positionality their bodies create “huge quantities of liquefied biomatter” (359), butchered like fish aboard a “sardine-processor” (361).

Fabricant meat feeds both fabricants and the humans that condemn them to servitude and death. Jason Mezey describes this society as “auto-cannibalistic” (25), wherein non-cloned human citizens, referred to as “consumers” (Mitchell, *Cloud* 188), “literally consume the processed remains of the servant class that upholds the political and ideological system in which they are invested” (Mezey 25). Fabricant bodies become “reclaimed proteins” (Mitchell, *Cloud* 359). The horror of the meat’s

production is subsequently juxtaposed to the banality of its later consumption in countless “dineries” (360). Posthuman bodies are “reclaimed” by the human population through the bodily and digestive act of eating. Consumption produces an embodied critique of human normativity. The “battlefield” of human subjectivity is located at “the molecular level” (342). Human purity is compromised as the collective human gut reclaims those aberrant posthuman bodies through digestion. This echoes the Darwinian axiom of human history proclaimed by Dr Henry Goose in the Pacific Journal narrative section: “The Weak are Meat the Strong do Eat” (508). But the novel’s depiction of consumption complicates this apparently natural evolution of human progress. With mouths, tongues and teeth, Mitchell’s human “consumers” have always been unknowingly becoming posthuman themselves as they exercise the homogenising violence of consumption and digestion.

Fabricant meat becomes a lively substance in the sense described by Bennett. She argues that “the quarantines of matter and life encourage us to ignore the vitality of matter and the lively powers of material formations” (vii emphasis in original). The protein at stake here occludes the national secret of eating fabricants, which proceeds by relegating this protein to “one side of an ontological divide between life and matter” (Bennett 51). This consumption practice frames fabricant bodies as both already dead and yet still to be killed, in order to maintain human life through diet. Both *Never Let Me Go* and *Under the Skin* make a similar move; Ishiguro’s students are killable because their organs already belong to a murderous national health service, and the gaze of the alien hunter carves up Faber’s human specimens well before they meet the butcher’s knife. Yet such framing fails to preclude the vivifying force of fabricant protein which erupts into *Cloud Atlas* as a grisly critique of the human’s ontological borders. Its harvest inspires a “horror” that resists adequate

description (Mitchell, *Cloud* 359) and instigates political and ethical effects, with the Archivist condemning the system as “the foulest perfidy” (360) and solidifying Sonmi-451’s political aims. The irruptive force of protein undermines the very binary that the entire “Orison” narrative balances upon; consumption practices have always already compromised the human/posthuman divide. Nea So Copros conceals a queer potentiality at the very heart of the human’s social and economic framework.

To this discussion of the posthuman’s queer disruption of the human through consumption, I want to add another layer to my argument about the sexuality of consumption. Colebrook argues that “gender and sexual binaries seem to be the last anarchism in a world that is elsewhere happily posthuman” (*Sex* 150). The posthuman bodies of Sonmi-451’s story are predominantly female, Asian, and working in the food service industry, although there is demand for “stolen fabricants ... made [sexually] serviceable after clumsy surgery” in the city’s brothels (331). All food servers are gendered as feminine, referred to as “stem-sisters” and “x-sisters” (358), however the novel is coy about the sexual difference of their bodies. By Sonmi-451’s own admission, she is “not xactly a girl” (325). Taken together with the surgical repurposing of fabricants for sex, the fabricated posthuman body can only approximate human sexual difference. As killable and non-reproductive, the posthuman body attracts a desire with no future.

As Adams demonstrates in her influential critique of meat’s sexual politics, the relation between women’s bodies and nonhuman animal flesh is mutually constitutive. Women and nonhuman animals are subject to indiscrete forms of violence. As I describe in Chapter Three, Adams writes that “[c]ultural images of sexual violence, and actual sexual violence, often rely on our knowledge of how animals are butchered and eaten” and “in images of animal slaughter, erotic overtones

suggest that women are the absent referent” (54). Through the gendered and animalised “absent referent,” Adams deconstructs the ontological difference between human and nonhuman animals.

To this “crossing of sexual and alimentary codes” (Shukin 257) *Cloud Atlas* introduces “codes” of human representation. The novel’s abattoir depicts a place where meat and sex intersect, and where the animalistic depiction of fabricant slaughter is haunted by the absent, yet anticipated, referential figure of the human consumer. In this way, the scenes aboard the slaughtership are readily historicised within traditional narratives of meat procurement based around the masculine and heterosexual role of the hunter, which I examine in Chapter Three in relation to the depiction of Isserley in *Under the Skin*. In particular, procuring and eating meat are codified with a series of “traditionally masculine traits such as strength, emotional detachment, know-how, cunning, brutality, and practicality” (Pilgrim 115). Pilgrim describes how the “structural similarities between hunting and sexuality” proceed through a hyper-masculine heterosexuality that objectifies and dehumanises the bodies of women and animals (120). Cultural images of sexualised and butchered bodies bleed into one another, so much so that the nonhuman animal “corpse signifies simultaneously two forms of consumption of flesh: meat, and sex” (Pilgrim 120). For *Cloud Atlas*, the literal objectification of female fabricants as meat serves a covert politics whereby normative humanness is tied up with dominant structures of gender and heteronormativity.

For Sonmi-451, witnessing the butchering of her own kind is a sexual awakening. As her and Hae-Joo Im board the ship, a male guard’s language is undeniably sexual: “Is tonite your maiden visit to our pleasuredome?” he asks Sonmi-451, before continuing: “there was no time like the first time” (357). When Sonmi-

451 and Hae-Joo Im later have intercourse, it is defined in opposition to the deathly biopolitical excess they have just witnessed: “Our sex was joyless, graceless and necessarily improvised; but it was an act of the living. Stars of sweat on Hae-Joo’s back were his gifts to me; these I harvested on my tongue” (361). Consuming posthuman flesh is reversed, with beads of human sweat described as “gifts” to be “harvested” by a posthuman mouth.

Sex recuperates human value for Sonmi-451. The narrative glosses over the improvisation required by their coupling; as discussed previously, fabricant bodies are not suited to human sexual intercourse. Recourse to the intimate scale of the couple is therapeutically corrective, providing solace from the abattoir’s gore in explicitly heterosexual terms: “Because of the horror, we numbed the memory of the slaughtership, the way a woman and a man may” (362). Recalling Butler’s regulatory “heterosexual matrix” (*Bodies* 11; *Undoing* 79), the heteronormative dyadic structure of this description skates over the “necessarily improvised” bodily reality that the novel has already suggested (361); their sex can only approximate the heterosexual human norm. Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* performs a similar move with its cloned students, who believe being in love will stave their deaths. Like Mitchell’s fabricants, Ishiguro’s clones are, as Carroll puts it, “without legitimate origin or reproductive legacy” (*Rereading* 139). However, each novel’s respective investment in the couple divulges “the deep implication of presumptions of heterosexuality in concepts of the human” (Carroll 144). In *Cloud Atlas*, Hae-Joo’s “stars of sweat” find accord with Sonmi-451’s comet-shaped birthmark as a symbol of humanity’s regenerative force that should not be inscribed upon her fabricated body (204). Heterosexuality’s normalising force elevates the couple to a transcendent scale of cosmological

symbolism, with the heterosexual meeting of human and posthuman bodies reflected in the natural imagery—stars and comets—of the nonhuman world.

Neohumanism and Posthuman Futurity: Reading the Anthropocene

A group of university students instantly recognise Sonmi-451 as a fabricant and question her relationship status: does she “have a boyfriend?” (232). Whilst openly regarded as a manifestly other “specimen freak” (233) she still attracts curiosity about whether or not she is part of a heterosexual couple. Seemingly flippant, this curiosity anticipates Sonmi-451’s later attempts to claim human value through an anthropocentric heteronormativity.

This normative entanglement of sexuality and human definition exposes the queerness of the posthuman in contemporary fiction and critical theory. Questions of the human persistently merge with questions of sex, gender and desire. For instance, Butler argues that the dehumanisation of non-heterosexual, trans and intersex minorities by Western humanism necessitates remaking the “restrictive conception of the human”: “an insurrection at the level of ontology, a critical opening up of the questions, What is real? Whose lives are real? How might reality be remade?” (*Precarious* 33). Whereas Butler’s analysis of queer subjectivity seeks to expand the domain of human lives that matter, Bersani identifies sex as a site for the destruction of human identity (221), and Luciano and Chen emphasise queerness’s displacement of human centrality. The nonhuman turn, they argue, facilitates taking “the term *queer* past its conventional resonance as a container for human sexual nonnormativities, forcing us to ask, once again, what ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ might look like apart from the anthropocentric forms with which we have become perhaps too familiar” (189 emphasis in original). Queerness’s relentless questioning of the human is of the

utmost importance in the Anthropocene, especially in light of the tendency to depoliticise specific human difference in this new geological epoch.

The Anthropocene rearticulates humankind as a monolithic figure that is ostensibly posthumanist—nonhuman, planetary, geological—but also intensely normative and hitched to notions of survival and reproductive futures. Through its geological vastness and nonhuman timescales, the Anthropocene warps the human's coherence and exactitude. The Anthropocene represents a profound derangement of anthropocentrism, which leads Haraway and Wolfe to describe the Anthropocene as “the ultimate posthumanist term—in the sense of utterly decentering” the human (238). They also demonstrate, however, that the Anthropocene erases the conditions of its own specificity as “a situated complex historical web of actions—and it could be, could have been, otherwise” (237-38). A central effect of this erasure runs against posthumanism entirely: the Anthropocene announces the idea of “an achieved humanity in the singular” and “the realization, or at least anticipation, of a unified human agent, reconceiving it and its possibilities in the prospect of the planet below it” (Clark, *Ecocriticism* 4). Clark argues that this “Leviathan of humanity en masse” undermines important forms of human difference (73): “The Anthropocene blurs and even scrambles some crucial categories by which people have made sense of the world and their lives” (9). As Lorimer puts it, the “common ‘us’” of a unified humankind in the Anthropocene “legitimizes a biopolitics that masks differential human responsibilities for and exposures to planetary change” (3). The new geological age of the planet not only ruptures anthropocentrism seemingly beyond repair but also renews the human as an intensely normative and unified category. This counter-intuitive effect, writes Clark, shows how “the Anthropocene, in its very danger, could also represent the hope for a new form of humanism, one tied to a

collective self-recognition of the human as ‘steward’ of the planet” (5). This hopeful new humanism restabilises humankind, effectively de-queering the human to ensure its survival and reproductive future. In the face of this ecologically necessitated neohumanism, fictional explorations of the human have renewed political and cultural significance because they continue to narrate and split the human and its others along axes of difference.

Clearly, this geological reframing of the human species is antithetical to the fracturing of the human that took place in theory and politics over the latter half of the twentieth century. As Grosz describes, diverse forms of poststructuralist thought have sought to explain the philosophical conceptualisation of the human “to address the limits, the forms of self-undermining, that this concept entails” (“Interview” 18). Interrogating the contours of the human is central to numerous politics of difference, writes Grosz: the “question of what constitutes the human ... constitutes the center of feminist, antiracist, and class-based struggles. These struggles have been elaborated around precisely the question of who to include or exclude when characterizing the human” (*Becoming* 15-16). Queer theory, disability studies and animal studies have also exposed the traditional human subject as “a hinge, a pathway, one of many, by which the world may understand itself” (Grosz, “Interview” 18). Effectively, the Anthropocene indicates the covert apotheosis of a resurgent humanism by fixating upon the human as a species unified by its destructiveness. Furthermore, this neohumanist resurgence encodes human futurity—reframed by the geologic register of the Anthropocene—as heteronormative and as a matter of anxious reproduction. Human extinction and ideas of a literally post-human future subsequently pose queer disruptions of drastic and apocalyptic proportions.

To further examine *Cloud Atlas*'s engagement with futurity and neohumanism in the Anthropocene, I now turn to two key examples from the text: a child fabricant thrown to its death from atop a bridge and an act of reading that goes on to frame the novel's sextet as a whole.

Sonmi-451 and Hae-Joo Im's relationship represents sexuality without a reproductive future, which operates as a key theme in posthumanist literature. "Fabricants don't have babies," says one woman to her curious child, "because they don't want them" (192). Framed as a matter of reproductive choice rather than biological impossibility, the mother delivers to her child a fantasy of "these lucky clones" (192): carefree women living in happy anticipation of the economic and happy "paradise" of their deathly retirement (192). As I return to throughout this thesis, Edelman's critique of reproductive futurism is useful here, which examines how the logic of heteronormativity seeks to secure the future for the symbolic figure of the child. Novels of the posthuman illustrate Western culture's entrenched "deference to imaginary Children," whose symbolic lives "are construed as endangered by the social disease as which queer sexualities register" (Edelman 19). In short, reproductive futurism describes how the future is continually "reproduced" for heterosexuality and heteronormative power structures, just as queerness is cast as a deadly threat to the child and the future. Queerness, of which Edelman also includes the failure of any couple to produce children (13), "stands between heterosexual optimism and its realization" as a future-oriented and future-guaranteeing sexual relation (Halberstam, *Queer Art* 106). Within the terms of this "hetero-logic of futurity" (Halberstam 120), heterosexual reproduction becomes a moral imperative to safeguard the survival of the human species. Reproductive futurism positions non-reproductive sexuality on the side of the destruction of "life itself" (Edelman 13), "the

persistent threat of apocalypse now—or later” (18) and a literally post-human “end to the future itself” for humankind (113). Ideas of queer non-futures harness twenty-first-century anxieties about the imminent prospect of human extinction. The thought experiment of humankind’s end shows that all sexuality, reproductive or not, has no future. Heteronormativity’s capacity to ensure its own continuance through reproduction faces immense problems in an uncertain future of climate change, ecological crises, destructive overpopulation and the Anthropocene.

The intersections between queer sexuality, human futurity and children are especially pertinent to *Cloud Atlas*’s representation of a posthuman child thrown to her death like “trash” (351). Sonmi-451 and Hae-Joo Im witness a rich man pull “an airbox” from the boot of his car, “one suitable for a medium-sized dog” or, as it happens, “a striking, perfectly formed but tiny girl, about thirty centimetres in height” (351). They watch in horror as “the man tossed her off the bridge by her hair. He watched her fall, and made a plopping noise with his tongue” (351). The girl is an emblematic child, “perfectly formed” in her “tiny” body but also characterised as animal-like: she “mewl[s] in terror” and is deprived of human language, giving a “miniature scream” that is “wordless but imploring” (351). As his wife smokes, the man disposes of the fabricated girl to ensure the happiness of their daughter. She has grown tired of the “fabricant living doll” (351): as the man rants, the “Zizzi Hikaru Doll was the *must-have*” but “Teencool surfs on and Marilyn Monroe dethrones poor *passé* Zizzi” (351 emphasis in original) who is “defective” and “couldn’t even sing” (352).

As a fabricated commodity and the product of non-reproductive technology, the posthuman child is dispatched by the couple to make way for the future happiness of their human child. Furthermore, the posthuman child appears in the narrative

before Sonmi-451 and Hae-Joo Im have begun their sexual relationship, almost as if in anticipation of the human's heteronormativity that Sonmi-451 hopes to approximate through such a union. In this sense, the dead doll symbolises a queer foreclosure of posthuman futurity in the novel, standing in for the impossible child that Sonmi-451 and Hae-Joo Im will never conceive from their non-reproductive sex. Sonmi-451 and Hae-Joo Im can only figure negatively and queerly in the terms dictated by reproductive futurism. Following Edelman, Sara Ahmed writes that "queer theory must be hopeless, must have 'no future,' which means saying no to the future. To affirm an order might be to define and regulate what is thinkable in advance of thought" (161). *Cloud Atlas* "affirms" such an order in its humanist projection of the future as *not* queer, as always regulated in advance by the stabilising structures of the human. Such a future is for the human and its reproductive perpetuation; any queer, mewling approximation of this must be dashed across the rocks as humanism's political collateral.

Parallel to this fiction, much of the discourse surrounding the Anthropocene is rendered in terms of reproductive futurism. Demands for political action to counter climate change make frequent appeals to the child by asking, "what kind of world do we want to leave our children?" The Anthropocene describes a monolithic humanity akin to Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's description of Western culture's orientation "towards a narrowly delineated, violently exclusionary normalcy" of reproductive futures ("Queering" 149). Consequently, the Anthropocene comes to name the grand geological frame that erases indexations of difference such as race, class, disability, sexuality and species.

Through erasing different ways of being human, the Anthropocene legitimates a return to humanism's idea of a united and homogenous version of the human. At

this vast scale, Clark writes, “everything and everyone is always ‘outside’: a person registers there less in terms of familiar social coordinates (race, class, gender and so on) than as a physical entity, representing so much consumption of resources and expenditure of waste (not the personality, but the ‘footprint’)” (“Scale” 161). As I write in Chapter One, the Anthropocene’s positioning of the human fetishises a singular, enormous geological “footprint” or inscriptive difference. In the now popular explanatory story used to narrate the scale of the Anthropocene, a future is imagined “where man’s effect on the planet will supposedly be discernible as a geological strata *readable* well after man ceases to be, even if there are no geologists who will be present to undertake this imagined future *reading*” (Colebrook, *Death* 10 my emphasis; see also Chakrabarty, “Climate of History” 197-98; Cohen and Colebrook 12; Colebrook, “Post-Anthropocene”; Wolfe and Colebrook; Zalasiewicz 158; see also Kolbert 109; Weisman 25-28). In this thought experiment, humans are asked to imagine a world after their extinction in which an impossible and specialised future reader—a scientist, no less—will interpret humankind’s indelible trace in the planet’s bedrock.

In a sense, the human of the Anthropocene is constructed through imagining this impossible geological reading of itself in the future. As Cohen and Colebrook put it, in “finding itself inscribed in the Anthropocene, [the human] cannot exit from inscription altogether” (10): “Humanity comes into being, late in the day, when it declares itself to no longer exist, and when it looks wistfully, in an all too human way, at a world without humans” (12). This collective version of the human emerges from the Anthropocene through a moral narrative; a value-laden and united “humanity” rediscovers itself through confronting its ecological destructiveness and in doing so, hopefully ensures its future survival. Thus the Anthropocene’s explanatory

narrative—a story of human extinction—becomes a story of human endurance in a very specific inscriptive sense and focalised through a particular kind of human reader. In the posthuman future of the Anthropocene, there will be no geologists to undertake such a specialised reading; similarly, as Colebrook wryly notes, there will be “no theorists” (*Death* 42). Nor, for that matter, will there be any novelists.

The Anthropocene thus provokes a significant question for literary studies: what kind of human is imagined and inscribed by novels in this new geological period? How do we tell stories about the human in the Anthropocene? As Braidotti contends, “the issue of representation” is “crucial for the Humanities and for critical theory” to confront the complexities of the Anthropocene and “visualize the subject” in this new era (82). Representation is central to this task of reconceptualising the human and its others in the Anthropocene, as Braidotti writes: “[f]inding an adequate language for post-anthropocentrism” means enlisting “the resources of the imagination” to “devise a new vocabulary, with new figurations to refer to the elements of our posthuman embodied and embedded subjectivity” (82). I argue that the planetary inscription of the human can be considered in concert with versions of the human imagined by contemporary novels such as Mitchell’s. How do novels like *Cloud Atlas* intervene in this broader ideological project of human representation and readability?

Mitchell’s novel clearly engages the posthuman as an ontological critique of human consumption practices and heterosexuality. However, the novel’s exploration of the posthuman is not unitary. *Cloud Atlas* also deploys the posthuman in a manner analogous to the Anthropocene thought experiment; the novel imagines the species facing extinction whilst continuing to read itself into perpetuity. In this respect, this novel is an imperfect fiction of the posthuman, giving rise to a “humanist relapse” to

borrow a phrase from Colebrook (“Creative” 111): a neohumanist resurgence of a normalising, dominant and transcendental human presence in the novel. This “relapse” becomes an overarching moral narrative for the human, indicative of the human’s reiterative presence and resilience as an identity construct and species. Importantly, the destabilisation of the human and “dethroning of humanity” (Colebrook, “Creative” 112) allows for such a neohumanist resurgence to take place. The posthuman paves the way for a neohumanist conception of the human.

Braidotti castigates “reactive approach[es]” to the posthuman, which she characterises as “neo-humanist” (38, 39). In particular, Braidotti identifies the philosopher Martha C. Nussbaum as a key proponent of neohumanism. As Braidotti explains, Nussbaum promotes “reasserting classical humanist ideals” (38) and a “new sense of inter-connection” to remedy the disruptions of globalisation and the market economy (39). Nussbaum has received heavy criticism for defending humanism (Braidotti 38) and reiterating human essentialism in ways that are particularly damaging to disabled persons (Harpham 68; Wolfe, *Posthumanism* 67-68). Nussbaum’s list of “The Central Human Capabilities” is a “notorious” catalogue of attributes supposedly inherent to all humans (Wolfe, *Posthumanism* 68). The list includes “[b]eing able to live to the end of a human life of normal length,” “[b]eing able to move freely from place to place,” “having opportunities for sexual satisfaction,” “[b]eing able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason—and to do these things in a ‘truly human’ way,” and “[b]eing able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one’s life” (Nussbaum 76-77). While perhaps blandly admirable in its picture of utopian human citizenship, the list clearly excludes a whole range of persons—disabled, non-heterosexual, non-white, refugees, children and even women—from access to the category of the human. Moreover, what does Nussbaum

mean by glossing over such generalisations as “truly human”? Within Nussbaum’s deeply problematic “neo-humanist ethics” of “abstract universalism,” Braidotti writes, “there is no room for experimenting with new models of the self; for Nussbaum the posthuman condition can be solved by restoring a humanist vision of the subject” (39). As Geoffrey Harpham puts it, Nussbaum provides “a refrigerator list” of how to be human in the twenty-first century (74).

Neohumanism is especially significant to *Cloud Atlas*’s depiction of the repeating comet-shaped birthmark. Luisa Rey seeks to rationalise away the birthmark’s significance, after she discovers in Robert Frobisher’s letters that he too had an identical mark between “shoulder-blade and collar-bone” (122; 124; see also 204): “[b]irthmarks can look like anything you choose, not only comets (124 emphasis in original). However, the repetition of the birthmark establishes a universalising thematics of a common human identity that transcends time and bodies. Timothy Cavendish’s ex-lover nicknames his birthmark “Timbo’s Turd” (373), Sonmi-451’s birthmark becomes her “stain” (204), and Zachry Bailey believes he has identified Sonmi-451’s reincarnation by a comet-like birthmark (324).

Through the birthmark, *Cloud Atlas* imagines a sense of the human that overrides specific differences in a similar fashion to Nussbaum’s neohumanism. As Childs and Green point out, “just as clouds are ever-changing coalescences of wind-blown water molecules, *Cloud Atlas* suggests that the human species is at once infinitely protean and bound together in an inter-reliant community that spans the boundaries of ethnicity and nation” (“Novels” 35). This version of the human becomes trapped within a cycle of endlessly repeating human stories, as Frobisher seems to intuit before killing himself: “Rome’ll decline and fall again, Cortazar’ll sail again and, later, Ewing will too ... you and I’ll sleep under the Corsican stars again,

I'll come to Bruges again, fall in and out of love with Eva again, you'll read this letter again, the Sun'll grow cold again" (490). Here, the inevitability of the human, and its inability to be anything other than what it has been, is traced through ancient history, to imperialist exploration, to love, and finally, to the end of the world after solar death. Clayton reads this aspect of *Cloud Atlas* as a literary interpretation of twenty-first-century "genome time," which "fuses the personal timescale of everyday life with the immense impersonal timescale of the species" (58). In this way, the "genetic code" or individual story of each character is just one expression of a common human experience "that runs through and beyond the individual, reaching back to the first primordial cell and forward to whatever future humanity may encounter" (58, 59). The supposed "entropy written in [human] nature," as philosophised by Ewing (528), is actually highly organised by the novel's unifying structures of the human, which are also "written" into the bodies of its characters.

Indeed as *Cloud Atlas* approaches the speculative prospect of the human's extinct future, it offers an act of reading to frame the entire novel. Retreating from the realisation of a literally posthuman world, this act of reading at the heart of *Cloud Atlas* reaffirms the human as the figure enshrined with the capacity to dictate the terms of meaning and narrative. At the conclusion of the novel's central section, "Sloosha's Crossin' an' Ev'rythin' After," Zachry Bailey has told the story of how he escaped the dangerous Hawaiian archipelago. The narrative voice then shifts to Bailey's son. This narrative section is constructed as part of an oral storytelling tradition, passed on from one generation to the next: from father to son, and onwards still (to the son's audience and the reader). It closes with a series of instructions from Bailey's son to his listeners and the reader of the novel: "Sit down a beat or two. Hold out your hands. Look" (325). These instructions conflate two defining actions of the

human: the intensely humanist activity of reading and the visual gaze. They thus evoke the dominance of “the figure of vision” and “therefore the figure of the human with which it is ineluctably associated” as an index of the humanist subject’s mastery of space and representation (Wolfe, *Animal* 2-3; see also *Posthumanism* 133-34). “[T]he look,” Wolfe writes, “purchases the transcendence of the human” (*Animal* 3) and is a repeating motif in novels of the posthuman (see Chapters Four and Five; see also Chapter One and my discussion of Grandin). The novel’s directive to “hold out your hands” and “look” reiterates this sense of the transcendent humanist subject and constructs the narrative as a physical object with a visual and tactile presence, like the object of the novel itself. This materialisation of narrative simultaneously opens up the second half of the novel (with the second halves of each story cascading away from Bailey’s son’s instructions) and encases the entire narrative within the physical limits of an object. As Hopf observes, Bailey’s story, “though it appears buried at the centre of the novel, is actually revealed to be the container of all the stories ‘below’ it” (116). Meaning is literally in the hands of the human and passed down (quite problematically) through lineages of men.

Bailey instructs his listeners to hold within their hands the “silv’ry egg what [his father] called ‘orison’” (324). This technological device contains the recorded testimony comprising the “Sonmi-451” narrative section: “Like Pa yarned, if you warm the egg in your hands a beaustome ghost-girl appears in the air an’ speaks” (324). By holding the orison, the human is constructed as a containing presence for the entire novel. In this respect, the novel’s centre becomes more than a symbolic archive or “sepulcher of history” as Boulter describes (131). The status of the human is explicitly at stake, framed by a future where “the candle o’ civ’lize is burnt away” (255). The anthropocentric enclosure of the novel becomes like a sanctified ritual

because an orison is also a prayer (“Orison,” def. 1a). Schoene suggests that the human’s narrative impulse is key to this representation of post-apocalyptic survival: “What survives ... is humanity’s irrepressible avidity for storytelling” (119). For Schoene, the novel culminates when Bailey’s son directs those around him to observe the recording of Sonmi-451’s story. The directive to “look” functions like a structural and thematic hinge: “This is the moment the future history opens up and simultaneously vanishes from view for good; it is the novel’s navel, its axial nadir and central turning point, simultaneously its ending and its recommencement” (Schoene 119).

This is also the human’s “ending” and its subsequent “recommencement” as an organising and regulating concept. This is key to the novel, as it begins to fold back upon itself via this retreat from the horror of a diminishing future. When Bailey’s son directs his listeners to watch Sonmi-451’s orison, he is also directing the novel’s theoretical gaze away from the threatening finality presumed by the Anthropocene scenario of a future without humans. Such a retreat is politically problematic because it begins to reinscribe an ever-present and seemingly self-evident human figure lurking behind all culture, text, theory and praxis. As Colebrook warns:

Let us not fall too readily into assuming the human, or assuming “our” intentional presence behind texts; let us short-circuit “man’s” continuing readability of himself in the context of texts *and* his reflexive mode of judgement whereby he sees marks drawn in the sand and immediately recognizes his own inescapable will. (*Death* 35 emphasis in original)

And yet, this is precisely what *Cloud Atlas* performs at its narrative heart. The human is instructed to recognise the “continuing readability” of its species within the orison, which in turn is held in the hands of this framing human reader. This reader, like the

Anthropocene thought experiment's future geologist, observes the continuance of the human as *the* defining and organising unit of thought and narrative to survive into the future.

Unlike the future geologist, who is invoked as a figure of specialised knowledge and specialised reading, the human that holds the orison in their hands is deprived of knowledge and understanding. Sonmi-451's hologram speaks "in an Old'un tongue what no'un alive und'stands nor never will, nay" (324). Bearing witness to the survival of human narrative is, significantly, an act of *uncritical* observation. For this future "reader," such an action serves no lasting practical or meaningful purpose: "It ain't Smart you can use 'cos it don't kill Kona pirates nor fill empty guts" (324). Its observation is entirely for spectacle and its soothing influence: "my kin'n'bros'll wake up the ghost-girl jus' to watch her hov'rin'n'shimm'rin'. She's beautesome and she 'mazes the litt'luns an' her murmin's babybye our babbits" (324-25). Consequently, reading the human in this speculative future is framed as an uncritical act, where a reassuring neohumanist presence lulls newborns to sleep and the posthuman future quietly recedes from view. Moreover, this retreat from the posthuman, through the sounds of Sonmi-451's story, functions as the unintelligible soundtrack to a community of vibrant heterosexual virility. Even though Bailey has died (324), his son survives to tell his story surrounded by "babbits" for whom the threat of extinction is unknowable, and who instead fall asleep to the sounds of the novel's unfolding lullaby of resurgent human life.

The "lurch into the Anthropocene," Chakrabarty writes, announces "the story of our necessarily divided human lives having to be supplemented by the story of our collective life as a species, a dominant species, on the planet" ("Climate and Capital" 15, 3). The collateral of this fetishised epochal focus on the species' influence, which

Colebrook describes as a “revised human exceptionalism, which the Anthropocene seems to have legitimated,” is an erasure of all other differences (“Post-Anthropocene”; see also “Sexual” 167-68). Anthropocene thinking asks us to look at how we are all human, all part of a destructive species exercising violence upon the planet through our very species-being. This erasure of difference is intensely problematic as Colebrook rightly observes, and demands rephrasing: the Anthropocene for whom? Who gets to speak, read, think and organise knowledge in the Anthropocene? (Colebrook, “Post-Anthropocene”). There is potential here for the Anthropocene to erase thinking about versions of human difference: sexual, gendered, racial, economic and geographic, but also nonhuman, inhuman, less-than-human and posthuman. The Anthropocene can engender a retreat from a critical politics of the human.

Cloud Atlas closes with young American lawyer Adam Ewing worried that his newfound anti-slavery politics will amount “to no more than one drop in a limitless ocean” (529). However, he rephrases his metaphor to assert an optimistically abstract and anthropocentric universal ethics imagined through nonhuman symbolism: “Yet what is any ocean but a multitude of drops?” (529). There are clear similarities between this ocean of drops and the example of a sky traced by cloud-like souls that opened this chapter. The human is articulated in nonhuman terms, like the Anthropocene’s regard for the human as a nonhuman geological force. Ewing’s oceanic metaphor illustrates ambivalence about human agency and ethics; the “limitless ocean” renders any individual drop of water irrelevant, much like the Anthropocene’s obliteration of human difference. Yet as a “multitude of drops,” the ocean symbolises a hopeful future of political inclusivity to counteract liberal

humanism's violent exclusions.¹ But in this fantasy of a "multitude" of lives welcomed into the human's ambit, the novel submits to the very erasure of difference that concepts like the human and its geological epoch rely upon.

Bailey's story of escape from the island narrates an escape from a sure death, reflecting *Cloud Atlas*'s own turning away from the prospect of imminent human extinction—perhaps the final border of difference to provoke critical thought. Bailey leaves behind the violence of the island in a kayak upon the water of "the Straits" (324), calling to mind Ewing's ocean of human agency, survival, inclusiveness and human rights. As Bailey is borne away from death upon the metaphorical tides of change, the novel recuperates the posthuman into its emergent neohumanism and resurgent human presence—a reiteration of the human as a solvent to the queer posthuman condition.

¹ Mitchell's representation of a "multitude of drops" could be discussed further in relation to Hardt and Negri's conceptualisation of the multitude as a collective of differences. They describe the multitude as "an internally different, multiple social subject whose constitution and action is based not on identity or unity (or, much less, indifference) but on what it has in common" (*Multitude* 100).

CONCLUSION

Inhuman Literature

This thesis has said a great deal about the ways in which twenty-first-century novels imagine the human differently, illustrating the significance of the posthuman to literature's interrogation of anthropocentrism and the widespread decentring of the human subject. Through the textual analyses offered here, the thesis has also traced the posthumanist critique jointly performed by theory and fiction. As I have shown, critical posthumanist theory enables us to scrutinise human stories, but fiction, too, actively "theorises" the human and its others. The novels examined in this thesis glimmer with political resonances and reshape the contours of the human as a cultural artefact. Novels of the posthuman are thought experiments of human ontology and also enable speculative engagement with timely questions of human futurity, such as those raised by the Anthropocene and humankind's extinct future. As I anticipate in this conclusion, the next stage of this work on reading the posthuman in novels may lie with emerging scholarship on ideas of the inhuman, which build upon the advances of posthumanism and facilitate further insight into the neohumanist tendencies of posthumanist literature.

Each chapter has drawn attention to the destabilising influence of the posthuman's queerness, outlining the fruitful intersections of posthumanist and queer theory as well as anticipating the ongoing contribution of queer theory to the nonhuman turn more broadly. Non-normative sexualities, sexual practices and bodies persistently attach to fictional representations of the posthuman, which apply immense pressure to normative constructions of humankind and its reproductive future. The queer posthuman inspires anxiety and desire, representing sexuality with

no future, intimacy beyond species boundaries, and love that defies the logic of extinction. Posthuman queerness unites the brutal subjugation of the other with a transgressive expansion of human difference.

The failures of posthuman representation that I have detailed—the tendency for novels of the posthuman to fall back upon reassuring scales of the liberal humanist subject—impart significant features of posthumanism and the mercurial nature of the posthuman as a queer literary trope. Posthuman queerness fluctuates in the novels examined by this thesis, exposing the indelible imprint of the normative human subject in fictions that radically disrupt anthropocentrism and the conventional anthropocentric coordinates of narrative. Literature's sympathy toward a resurgent neohumanism, however, further exemplifies literature's reworking of human subjectivity under duress. The neohumanist tendencies of these novels enliven, rather than dissipate, the posthuman's queering of humanist frameworks. The donations program continues unabated in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, regulating the health of normal human citizens through the transplantation of less-than-human organs. Michel Faber's *Under the Skin* concludes with Isserley's thoroughly humanist fantasy of the sublime possibilities afforded by the natural world, but her wish to become part of the Scottish landscape and escape her maimed body remains unresolved in the novel. Faber leaves open the chance that her dead human-like alien body will be discovered on the side of the road by human passers-by; the ambiguity of this ending reverberates with disruptive potential, beyond the novel's final page. Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and Jeanette Winterson's *The Stone Gods* proceed upon the narrative inevitability of humankind's endless rediscovery after human extinction; these novels queer human futurity, subverting the reproductive future of the species, but then project the human into the extinct future. However, this

human projection is far from normative; for Atwood, Jimmy's masculine heroism yields to his pathetic yearning for inter-species sex, and for Winterson, forbidden love and its extinguishment engender a plenitude of human futures, queer and proliferating. The cascading narrative of David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* may collapse inward toward a hopeful conclusion of political inclusiveness for the category of the human, but this optimistic finale does not erase its transgressive human/fabricant love story or solve the problem of a diminishing future and the threat of extinction faced by the characters of its innermost narrative.

The sympathy of these novels for the human's normative intensity raises interesting questions for the expansion of reading the posthuman in literature. Even though these novels refuse to stabilise human subjectivity and provide it with a safe narrative future, the literary extension of empathy for humankind brings to mind Luciano and Chen's description of the humane, affective and routinely feminised sense of the human (190). This version of the human subject symbolises the "humanity" of the human, as well as inspiring and concentrating sympathy "to make tolerable the damage inflicted by [the] possessive individualism" so characteristic of humanism more broadly (190). By harbouring sympathies for the traditional human subject, novels of the posthuman embody and perform the humanising and affective sense of the human, as described by Luciano and Chen. Novels of the posthuman continue to embrace the human subject, critiquing but also preserving the idea of literature as a repository of our humanity and our best selves.

There is undoubtedly something laudable in the literary project which unites the novels analysed in this thesis, but also something deeply worrying. The shared attitude of these novels bears an uncanny resemblance to the humanising drive of the literary canon and its historically racist deployment, because the sympathetic subject

“remains as normatively white as the figure of Man” (Luciano and Chen 190) as well as being cloyingly gendered.

Emerging scholarship on the idea of the “inhuman” may afford us a way to re-read literature’s sympathy for the human even in radically posthuman stories, and therefore expand posthumanism’s critique of fiction and the posthuman. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen defines the inhuman in terms of catastrophe and companionship, drawing out the term’s connotations of difference (through the negative prefix of “in-”) and intimacy (through reading “in-” as a marker of “estranged interiority”) (*Stone* 10). Cohen’s analysis has significant implications for the study of literature. He is taken by the “story-filled encounters with the inhuman” (10), the storied “confederations of human and inhuman” (20) and the inhuman’s frustration and spurring of “narrative intervention” (80). Cohen’s investigation of the inhuman focuses on the “geologic embrace” of human and stone (80), evoking the peculiar entwining of love and the inhuman. Cohen is perplexed by stone’s “strangely inhuman (I don’t know what else to call it) love” (73). Similarly, Morton writes that a central task of understanding materiality beyond the human is “to figure out how to love the inhuman: not just the nonhuman (that’s easier) but the radically strange, dangerous, even ‘evil’” world with which humans are entangled (*Ecological* 43). In this sense, Alaimo proposes “igniting a love for that which is elemental in this strangely altered and altering world” of the Anthropocene to maintain the generative wonder of the nonhuman world (306). She describes this elemental love as “queer art” and a form of intimacy destined to fail (306).

These notions of an affective and loving relation with the inhuman world resonate in peculiar ways with the idea of the humane subject that I outlined earlier. Through these affective, inhuman relations—whereby humans are enmeshed,

imprinted and altered by that which is radically different and intimate—the human subject undergoes a kind of rehabilitation or ecological enlightenment, by which they recognise their imbrication and become more humane. Such a rehabilitative move is suggested by Herbrechter and Callus’s description of “[t]he posthuman challenge to human(ist) care,” which is “simple but fundamental”: “Do you care enough for your humanity to allow the posthuman to be?” (108). As Herbrechter and Callus point out, “in rediscovery of that capacity” to care, “humanity is revived” (109). In this “almost corny” notion, “there is the danger that it leaves the values and assumptions of humanism, and certainly its rhetoric, intact” (109). Wolfe, too, proffers a care-laden and compassionate posthumanist ethics for the subject who is able to see clearly its obligations to other lives and, in doing so, rediscover their properly posthumanist humanity (*Posthumanism* 142).

Weinstein and Colebrook anticipate the next move for work on the inhuman and posthumanism more broadly. They make a significant departure from care and the problem of humanising the careful subject. They propose the inhuman as a means of sidestepping the recuperative gestures of some aspects of the posthuman (such as the neohumanism I have described), outlining an expansive critical project for the inhuman. They write:

inhuman orients us to all that is not human, not just that which comes after the human. It also pushes us to scales beyond the human—temporalities and spatialities both deep and astronomical. Inhuman also contains murmurs of a humanist ethical upending, in that it denotes a lack of the ostensibly human qualities of compassion and mercy, as well as ‘cruelty, savageness, and barbarism.’ Savageness and barbarism themselves overlap with commonplace racist and colonialist discourses often used to sketch the perimeters of what

and who gets counted as human, implying that adopting the position of the inhuman serves to rearrange these pernicious discourses. (emphasis in original)

Their conceptualisation of the inhuman clearly rejects the inhuman intimacy put forward by Cohen, Morton and Alaimo, and runs counter to the ethics of care described by Herbrechter, Callus and Wolfe. The inhuman, in Weinstein and Colebrook's sense, resonates with Stengers' description of the growing barbarism, cruelty and violence of the twenty-first century (23), which seems likely to grow as the Anthropocene solidifies. Furthermore, the inhuman's intersections with pertinent questions of race, especially in light of climate change's disproportionate impacts on poor and racial minorities, prompt posthumanist theory more broadly to confront the human's racist politics more substantively.

What might it be to read with the inhuman? How might we read with and against the intimate and barbaric tendencies of literature and its imagining of the human in the new century? I imagine Weinstein and Colebrook's inhuman as a necessary and timely addition to Herbrechter and Callus's idea of posthumanism as a reading practice that interrogates how literary and cultural texts set up assumptions about what the human is (95). Reading the human with an inhuman framework would examine more closely literature's production of affective and savage thought experiments of the human and its others. Building upon the disruptive work of the posthuman, the inhuman would resist and remobilise literature's provision of a refuge for the human; why love for the human, in all its cruelty, and why now? Reading with the inhuman would resituate the neohumanist resurgence in literature as part of a broader thematics of intimacy and difference in the age of the Anthropocene, climate change and extinction. By embracing the barbarity and renewal of love engendered by

this twenty-first-century context, novels could begin to reshape their own savage and intimate relationship with the human and produce a thoroughly inhuman literature.

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